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HAS would-be London mayor Stephen Norris had a change of heart?

The old shagger has consistently said he would scrap congestion charging if he got into the big glass house by the Thames. But at last month's international Intelligent Transport Systems conference in Madrid he sang a rather different tune.

Safely out of earshot from the London *Evening Standard*, he was talking up the idea of using "sophisticated Global Positioning System (GPS) technology" to develop C-charging in a way that varies depending on the time of day and allows traffic experts to manage the flow of vehicles. He was clearly in favour of keeping the charge, just changing the way it is run.

"I believe that the future is in charging schemes in urban areas that will rely on GPS technology," he told the audience.

PS: Not only is Norris president of the traffic management industry lobbying body the UK Intelligent Transport Society, but he is also a director of ITIS Holdings.

PPS: And what does ITIS make? It's the proud producer of the NavTrak GPS vehicle-tracking system, and describe itself as "the largest consumer telematics customer base using GPS/GSM technology." Just the organisation to set up a large, metropolitan GPS-based charging scheme…

THAT BIG CONVERSATION IN FULL

Cover by Nick Newman

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ABC

"GLAIRING Errors in Tony's CV" the *Sun* chortled last week, gleefully reproducing the typo-ridden application letter submitted by Tony Blair when he applied for the Sedgefield Labour candidacy in 1983.

Yet the paper completely overlooked the most "glairing" error of all — his boast that in the previous year he had fought a by-election at Beaconsfield, "a Tory seat with a majority of 93,000. I lost, unsurprisingly."

As anyone with a passing knowledge of local constituencies could have guessed, this was a ludicrous claim to make. For the record, the majority from the 1979 election that the Conservative party enjoyed going into the by-election was 21,505. It was then reduced to just over 10,000, though no thanks to young Tony: Labour's share of the vote was virtually halved from 20 to 10 percent.

Two explanations for Blair's exaggeration suggest themselves. He could have meant 9,300 (though that too would have been wrong) and accidentally typed in another 0. Alternatively, as with his famous boyhood recollections of sitting to watch Jackie Milburn weave his magic at St James's Park and being a stowaway on a flight bound for the Caribbean, he was embroidering the truth to make himself seem more impressive. Now which could it be?

MICHAEL Howard was in waspish form when he squared up to Tony Blair last week. "This grammar school boy is not going to take any lessons from that public school boy on the importance of children from less privileged backgrounds gaining access to university," the leader of the opposition taunted.

Howard is of course well placed to take the side of the underprivileged in the education debate. His own son was dispatched at the age of 13 to the school of hard knocks that is Eton College.

***INDEPENDENT* pundit and MBE-returner Yasmin Alibhai-Brown has written recently about the "outrageous" Labour MP Denis MacShane. "His mouth sometimes fires off before his brain is properly open for business," she says. "It is a sad handicap, especially for a British foreign office minister who presumably is supposed to be diplomatic and linguistically smart."**

However Alibhai-Brown has not always treated MacShane with such scorn. A few months ago, Lord Gnome has learned, she met him at a Fabian conference and asked in all seriousness "Will you make me an ambassador, please?" The minister seemed unenthused by the idea. But since she omits to mention this snub in her recent diatribe, we must assume that it is wholly unrelated.

GET ready for 15 December — "Change-Over" day for the hundreds of Job Centres currently run by the bureaucratic, fuddy-duddy old department of work and pensions but soon to fall into the hands of Trillium, an exciting international consortium.

An intriguing insight into the change over is the problem of security. In the bad old days of public ownership, DWP staff came and went from their buildings as they liked and were trusted to look after the security. This isn't good enough for Trillium, however. At great expense it has contracted the security of all the buildings to two security firms, Securitas and Group Four.

Caretakers are being hired at £2,500 a year (or about £10 a day) to look after about 700 buildings that previously had no caretakers at all. This will cost (at least) an extra £1m a year, a sum that is being charged to the department (ie taxpayers).

SIR Nicholas Montagu, the chairman of the Inland Revenue who keeps telling colleagues he is not going to resign and that Gordon Brown who appointed him doesn't want him to, was in the hot seat again at the House of Commons on 3 December.

His problem this time was the tax credit scandal, which he himself admitted had gone "spectacularly wrong". In his testimony Sir

"Careful, it could be a sock-bomb"

Nicholas achieved the unusual distinction of appearing more secretive even than EDS, the American firm and *Eye* favourite that made huge profits from the spectacular disaster.

When Labour MP Frank Field insisted that the MPs should be told the extent of compensation that EDS will pay the government for the disaster, Bill Thomas, president of EDS, was clearing his throat to answer when Sir Nick intervened. The matter, he said, was "commercially confidential" and so senior people who know the facts should keep their mouths shut. Mr Thomas gratefully obliged.

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

23 November: Report commissioned by the department for education and skills (DfES) identifies children in care as being at risk of dropping out of education entirely.

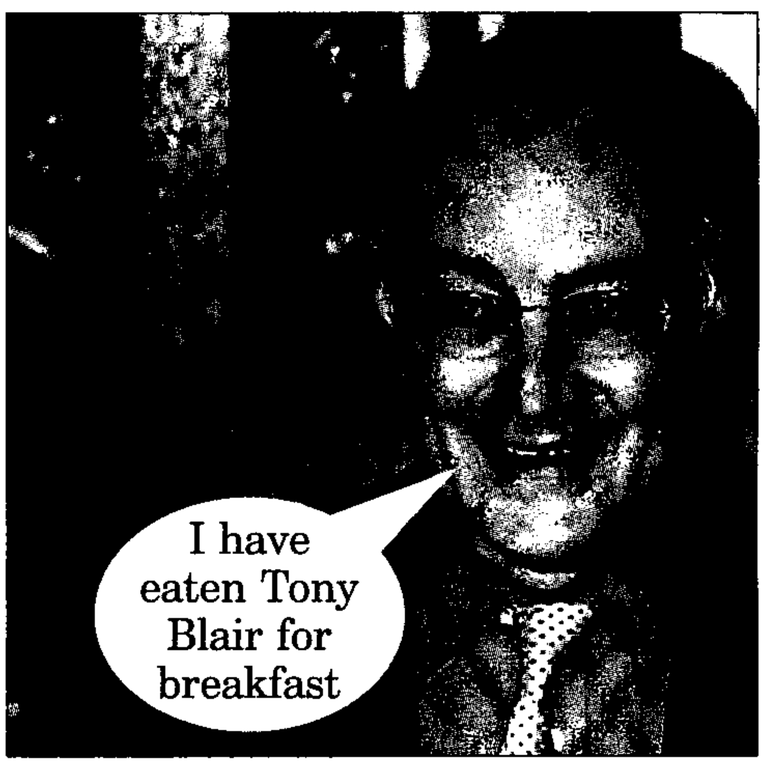
23 November: Home office announces plans to take children of asylum-seekers into care "for their own protection".

EYEBROWS have already been raised at Royal Mail's bizarre idea of giving £1m to the London Olympic bid to say sorry to customers for the disruptions caused by striking postal workers last month.

Given the postal service's financial troubles, how can it fund the generous gesture? Might not the money be better spent improving sorting office working conditions so staff don't have to deal with dead rats any more? And surely there are more deserving causes than the probably futile Olympic bid.

In fact Royal Mail has been quite open about the fact that this £1m "donation" is not to come out of Royal Mail's meagre £3m profits. Instead, it explains, the donation is to be funded through sales of special stamp booklets during 2004. Er, isn't that a donation by customers then? A novel way indeed to compensate everyone for the letters and parcels.

BRITISH CANNIBAL NAMED



NEWS

THE Queen visited Frimley Park hospital recently to see her daughter-in-law Sophie Wessex, who was recovering after the premature birth of her baby. Shortly afterwards the hospital's chief executive received a letter from the palace.

"Her Majesty the Queen has asked me to send to Frimley Park hospital the flowers which accompany this letter," wrote Lt Col Charles Richards, deputy master of the royal household. "The flowers were used last night for the state banquet given by the Queen for the President of the United States of America and Mrs Bush. The flowers should have enough bloom in them to give pleasure for a day or two."

Brenda might be surprised to learn that staff were underwhelmed by her gesture. They had coped willingly with the consequences of Sophie's admission to Frimley Park: the hospital was paralysed for certain periods, the switchboard was impenetrable, the car-park was blocked and ordinary patients had difficulty getting in and out. And they were delighted that the story had a happy ending. But, as one observes: "How extraordinary that the Queen is so anally retentive that she cannot even mention in the letter why she has sent it. A personal note thanking the hospital for the care and consideration given to her daughter-in-law and new grandchild would have been sufficient. But Brenda doesn't do 'thank-you'."

So, in lieu of gratitude, they had to make do with Dubya's hand-me-down flowers.

IN THE last issue we reported that Marta Andreasen, the European commission whistleblower who was suspended by commissioner Neil Kinnock for pointing out the ease with which the EU could be defrauded, had received an award from *Accountancy Age* magazine.

Congratulations are now due to Mr Kinnock himself, who is getting a gong of his own. On Thursday 11 December at a ceremony in Maastricht he will be presented with the Alexis de Tocqueville prize by the European Institute of Public Administration in recognition of "the important reform of the commission's personnel policy that he has been carrying out since 2001, which profoundly changes the career structure for officials, training measures, the rules relating to mobility as well as evaluation and promotion mechanisms".

Just to prove that such work is still ongoing, Mr Kinnock last month issued a new warning to Ms Andreasen, who has been suspended from her job for more than a year, denying her permission to speak in public. The accountant received a letter from Mr Kinnock instructing her that if she planned to attend an internal audit conference in Amsterdam, or any other such gatherings, she was obliged to remain silent at all times.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"I certainly don't agree with those who say that television is just another commodity to be marketed and sold around the world like Starbucks or Coca-Cola."

— Greg Dyke's Emmy award acceptance speech, 24 November.

"Top of the Pops and the BBC Radio 1 chart will be sponsored by Coca Cola next year. The drinks giant has signed a multi-million pound deal to be the sponsor of the pop charts."

— Children's BBC news online, 2 December.

Street of Shame

LIFE under Rebekah Wade has never been easy. But thanks to the *Daily Mirror*'s recent scoops the flame-haired *Sun* editrix is now even more fearsome than usual.

On the day that trainee *Mirror* hack Ryan Parry revealed how he had wormed his way into the palace, Wade began her morning editorial conference by demanding: "What have you fat, lazy, overpaid cunts got for me?"

Luckily she was not quite so angry about Monday's *Mirror* splash, in which another of Piers Moron's young hacks infiltrated a detention centre for asylum seekers to expose the racism of the Group 4 security officers. "Jamaicans are drug-dealing pieces of shit," one said, "Algerians are the slimiest bastards in the world, all terrorists, and the Chinese are evil little bastards." Since these views are shared by many *Sun* readers, and several of its contributors, Rebekah would have been unlikely to give them the shock-horror treatment.

Even so, she remains furious that the *Mirror* keeps getting scoops that are followed up elsewhere, while her paper can manage nothing better than news of Zara Phillips's latest boyfriend. She has demanded that each of her fat, lazy, overpaid cunts come up with five "agenda-setting stories". So expect a similar *Sun* stunt any day now. *Sun* trainee becomes Cherie Blair's new lifestyle adviser, perhaps?

"Wait, before we go into the Joneses for dinner... what's our exit strategy?"

THESE are explosive times at the *Daily Star*, where volcanic editor Peter "Mentally" Hill is enjoying new status among his long-suffering hacks following a recent set-to with bullying proprietor Richard "Dirty" Desmond.

The first sign of defiance came during one of the unbearably dull Friday meetings with the chairman, when Desmond asked the editor about circulation figures. Hill told him to repeat the question, explaining that "I have been dead for over half an hour".

Cranked up by the possibility of For Sale signs being erected at the *Daily Hurleygraph*, and with his ego boosted by respectful articles in the *Independent* and the *Guardian*, Dirty Des wasn't likely to let such insubordination go unpunished. A few days later, as the paper was ready to go to press, he took the opportunity to sink his teeth into the editor's tender rump. "Your front page," he announced, "is crap".

Close to breakdown, Hill decided enough was enough. Tearing the front page from the stick-up dummy, he screwed it into a ball and threw it at the startled chairman. "If that's how you fuckin' well feel, well fuck you. You can do it your fuckin' self because I have fuckin' had e-fuckin-nough."

As Desmond high-tailed it for the service lift like a Bond villain escaping the commencement of battle, his flunkey Paul Ashford was left to take the rest of the flak. "Throw the fuckin' lot out," the editor continued, "because the fuckin' proprietor doesn't fuckin' like fuckin' any of it." Raging Hill couldn't be calmed and deputy Hugh Whittow, sensing the editor's chair might soon be vacant, stepped in to save the day with a new front page.

IN ITS breathless account of Dubya's "audacious" trip to Iraq, the *Times* reported that "Mr Bush's aircraft touched down in Baghdad after sunset, with its lights darkened and windows closed to minimise the chances of it becoming a target."

Well, that's what the first edition said. The phrase was hastily amended to "lights darkened and blinds closed" for the next edition, when some bright spark in the newsroom asked what was so "audacious" about flying with the windows shut.

A FEW years ago, in one of his madder moments, Charles Moore tried to sack all the Daily Telegraph's crossword compilers. The idea was to have the crossword generated by computer, using recycled old clues and grids.

After the *Eye* exposed this villainous plan the editor was deluged with protests, whereupon he had to back down and issue a public apology to readers.

But it seems this may only have been a temporary reprieve. With the paper more cash-strapped than ever, *Telegraph* boxwallahs are secretly plotting to introduce the scheme as soon as the present crossword editor Val Gilbert retires.

Meanwhile, those who fear that the *Telegraph* crossword is already dumbing down will have had their suspicion strengthened by the clue to 18 down in one of last week's puzzles: "Grapple for Greek fruit (7)." The answer was, er, "grapple".

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Rugby union is the new rock'n'roll." — Sky Sports.

"Coat-hangers are the new rock'n'roll." — *Elle Decoration*.

"It would appear that rock'n'roll is the new rock'n'roll." — *Guardian*.

"Chocolate is the next coffee." — *New York Times*.

"Chocolate is the new olive oil." — *New York Times*.

"Ignorance is the new knowledge." — *Financial Times*.

"God is the new black." — Cristina Odone on the *Today* programme.

"Mesopotamia is the new Egypt." — Archaeologist Eleanor Robson, *Oxford Today*.

"Fish is the new steak" — Jill Dupleix, the *Times*.

"Onshore: is it the new offshore?" — *Legal Week*.

RED FACES all round Fleet Street after a raid on a private detective by investigating officers from the information commissioner found incriminating details of scores of tabloid hacks having paid a private eye to break the law.

Ex-directory phone numbers, numbers of family and friends, vehicle licence traces and criminal record investigations – all illegal under the data protection act, all commissioned by journalists whose papers claim to support the right to reasonable privacy.

This may explain why when a Met detective was arrested on corruption charges there was not a squeak out of the press. But the names of the victims and the reporters and photographers who were clients are all detailed. Prosecutions will follow as sure as night follows day or as desperate hacks follow celebs…

Recipe

by Adrian Barret-Smith, dead chef at the Village Hotel & Leisure Club Hyde

Tameside Advertiser

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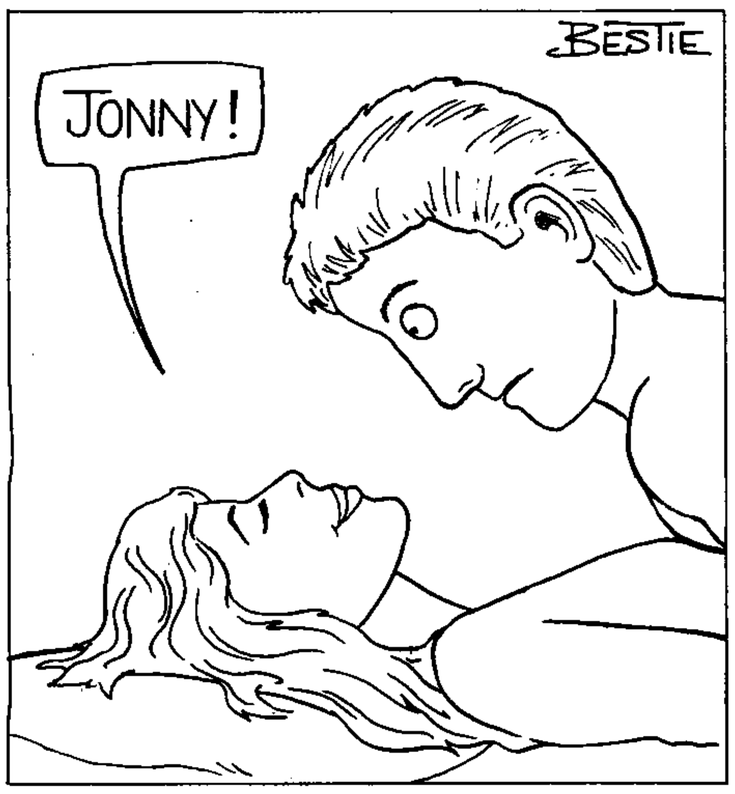
"The lorry is the Jonny Wilkinson of UK industry – scoring points and ensuring progress for the national economy. It is high time that politicians started to plan for the lorry rather than plan against it. The outdated 1980s notion of 'bash a lorry, win a vote' must be kicked into touch."

— Press release from Freight Transport Association.



SHE DECIDED TO LIE BACK AND THINK OF ENGLAND

THE lamentable *Ireland on Sunday*, created by Associated Newspapers in the hope of breaking into the Dublin market, is trying hard to appease the locals after complaints that it is largely padded out with English features cut-and-pasted from the *Mail on Sunday* in London.

Editor Martin Clarke, whose editorial pep talks are known as "the vagina monologues" because of his fondness for the c-word, decided that England's victory in the rugby world cup was the ideal opportunity for a bit of anglo-bashing. He gave over the editorial page to a feature headed "25 ways to get over this nightmare", offering consolation to distressed Irish readers. "We may not be going to the European championships next year but at least none of our national team players wears a skirt… We — the Irish and the Australians — invented sport, not the English… Our boys didn't wear those namby-pamby skin-tight shirts…"

The persistent use of the first-person plural left Clarke's hacks and readers rather puzzled. As they know — but he himself seems to have forgotten — the London-appointed editor is, er, English.

WHO dare accuse the *Times* of dumbing down while it continues to employ the awesome Renaissance woman Mary Ann Sieghart as a columnist?

When Sieghart is due to appear on TV, and the programme's researchers ask how she'd like to be introduced, her reply is: "Deputy editor of the *Times* [which she isn't] — and one of the 10 cleverest women in Britain."

Number crunchings

552

■ Articles in national media reporting the trial of Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr in past month

2

■ Articles in national media reporting the attorney general's declaration that media coverage of the trial is "frankly unacceptable"

HACKWATCH

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

IN November 1969 John Lennon sent his MBE back to Buckingham Palace "in protest against Britain's involvement in the Nigeria-Biafra thing, against our support of America in Vietnam, and against 'Cold Turkey' slipping down the charts".

The *Independent* columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown has even more reason than the late Mr Stiggy Topes for returning her MBE, as she revealed last week. She is showing solidarity with Benjamin Zephaniah, who has refused an OBE. But her gesture is also a protest against US imperialism, David Blunkett's treatment of asylum seekers, Tony Blair's "delusions of grandeur" and the rise of neo-conservatism. Oh, and she wishes to demonstrate her revulsion at "the sordid details of royal life" revealed by Paul Burrell, and "the millions of pounds of tax revenue spent by Charles on refurbishing Clarence House".

So why did she originally accept the honour – "for services to journalism" – two years ago? "Because I am worth it," she explained at the time. And, gong or no gong, she still is…

22 September 2003: Alibhai-Brown is appalled that some people have gone to jeer at David Blaine in his glass box. "It isn't cool; it isn't a laugh; it doesn't show us to be brilliantly acerbic compared to our credulous American cousins; it isn't clever at all." The heckling of Blaine is "Ugly Britain Unzipped", revealing how "frazzled, uncouth and nasty" we have become. "We fail our nation unless we take seriously this growing social anarchy," she warns. "We must start etiquette lessons in our schools."

29 September: The BBC should be defended against attacks from the government and the press, Alibhai-Brown declares. Even so, "love of the Beeb cannot be blind, and mine is not". There remain "endemic problems", notably the exclusion of black and Asian people such as herself from radio and TV. "The BBC," she complains, "will still not see me as an equivalent of, say, Peter Hitchens, or Jonathan Freedland." Presumably it must be some other Yasmin Alibhai-Brown who is such a ubiquitous guest on *Question Time*, the *Today* programme, etc.

6 October: "Remember that pale skinned lovely, Zalikhan Elikhadzhiyeva who, earlier this year, walked into a rock concert in Moscow to blow herself up and take others with her?" Alibhai-Brown muses. "This Sabbath, Maxims, a popular Arab-Jewish restaurant in Haifa, was blown up by a Palestinian suicide bomber – another beautiful woman, Hanadi Jaradat…" Would it make any difference if the suicide bombers were ugly? She doesn't say. Instead, she concludes with a startling discovery. Although George Bush and Ariel Sharon are undoubtedly evil, Russia, China and Britain are pretty oppressive too. "So," she writes, "here I am today, forthright critic of the US and Israeli governments, having to remind people and myself that these aren't the only bad guys on our planet." Shock, horror!

13 October: At the Labour conference, "I was surprised to get kisses galore and offers of many drinks from MPs and ministers, and for that a big thank you. Even Peter Mandelson was affable and warm. Maybe they are more forgiving of mavericks than I believe." This from a maverick who writes for national newspapers, broadcasts constantly, sits on government advisory committees and dines with the great and the good. Is she really surprised that MPs are keen to schmooze her?

27 October: American neo-conservatives are a scary lot, but what about the neo-cons in our own country? There are, Alibhai-Brown reveals, plenty of them in the inner counsels of the Blair government, "espousing the rhetoric of 'enlightened' colonialism… When I meet some of these neo-cons, I can feel their intense discomfort that someone like me is now in their corridors." So she is in the corridors of power after all. Whatever happened to the marginalised outsider we all know and love?

3 November: Michael Howard was a reactionary home secretary, "and he will be the same as Conservative leader, mark my words". Not a very controversial verdict from a leftish liberal pundit in the *Independent*, you might think. But Alibhai-Brown believes there is a conspiracy to gag anyone who dares criticise the new Tory leader. "There is now a whole industry engaged in this new McCarthyism. No matter. Michael Howard is one of the worst leaders the Tories could have elected, and nothing is going to make me flinch from saying this." How fearless can you get?

10 November: Alibhai-Brown has been to see *Spellbound*, a cinema documentary about the United States National Spelling Bee contest. As she watched it, "even I, a relentless critic of US government policies, had to admit that there is much in that country that is laudable and enviable… We mock President Bush and his stupidities, but can you imagine such a competition in this country?" Quite so. But how will British schoolchildren find time for spelling bees while also taking an intensive course of "etiquette lessons" teaching them not to snigger at American magicians?

24 November: Alibhai-Brown savages the foreign office minister Denis MacShane for his "outrageous" suggestion that young British Muslims need to decide whether they support the values of democracy or those of terrorism. Why, she demands, should Muslims "swear allegiance to only one part of their multiple identities"? Curiously, however, on 1 October Alibhai-Brown wrote a long feature for the *Daily Mail* about domestic violence and so-called "honour killings" in British Asian families.

"I believe we need to establish a new contract with people in our nation – all of us, whatever our colour, background or beliefs, must buy into basic principles and try to live by them," she argued then. "These can then be communicated to refugees and immigrants as non-negotiable." Under this contract, Muslims and others would be expected to renounce wife-beating and other "customs which are intolerable". But not terrorism, apparently.

1 December: Alibhai-Brown tells the world she is returning her MBE. She seems to think that this will cause "a nationwide eruption", like Benjamin Zephaniah's refusal of an OBE. "I will have to weather the attacks, private and public, in part because I deserve them," she admits. "I also expect unfair attacks. I will be charged with being discourteous and manipulative, publicity seeking, for having no consistency, much worse I am sure." Alas! It is indeed "much worse": apart from a bit of mild ribbing from David Aaronovitch in the *Guardian* ("I have not received an honour, so I cannot return it… In fact, I have quite enough difficulty in failing to resign from the History Guild Book Club"), her heroic sacrifice provokes no reaction whatever!

PS: Worse still, she was trumped the very next day by the black feminist Elsie Owusu, who announced in the *Guardian*'s letters page that she was thinking of returning her OBE in protest at "the jingoistic reaction in the press regarding the English (not British) rugby victory. The idea of a vainglorious parade is exclusive of the whole ethnic-minority population of this island and redolent of Anglo-Saxon imperialism… Unless I am persuaded that my OBE is a symbol of hope for young black women, I shall shortly be returning it." Why didn't Yasmin Alibhai-Brown think of that?

TONY BLAIR and Gordon Brown want to know why, when they are spending more on public services, so little of the money is reaching the frontline. But do they really need to spend even more taxpayers' money hiring consultants to lead teams of civil servants and then tell them the blindingly obvious?

Given all the botched IT contracts, costly but unproductive privatisations and burgeoning numbers of new managers and "targets", it's no wonder staff are spending more time serving their organisations than their "customers".

Take the extraordinary expansion of the National Probation Directorate, set up after the service was reorganised in 2001. It has grown by nearly 400 percent and now employs 430 staff, including 32 consultants.

According to probation union Napo, the expansion has been accompanied by a plethora of new targets ranging from increased drug-testing to race equality and ensuring that probation hostels run at 95 percent capacity. In addition staff have to deal with a string of catastrophic IT projects (cf Crams, Quantum and Libra) and equally disastrous privatisations such as the sale of the probation estate along with its cooks, cleaners and gardeners.

Staff are so overworked and demoralised that one in 20 frontline jobs is currently vacant. Realising that the service was going to go heavily in the red just to stand still, ministers recently allocated it an extra £70m. It is believed that less than 10 percent actually reached any of the 42 probation areas.

So far the cabinet and treasury team has identified six key areas for efficiency review. Among them are – surprise, surprise – IT functions, buying in goods and services, estate management and bureaucracy and "productive time" – ie whether staff spend too long serving the organisation rather than the customer.

TONY BLAIR has a habit of governing by envoy rather than through government department; and his latest recruit is Brian Wilson, the former energy secretary who is now Tony's "special representative" on energy supply and trade opportunities in Iraq and Afghanistan.

After Number 10 confirmed that Wilson answers directly to the PM for this unpaid role, *Private Eye* asked Wilson if his job demonstrates that there was after all a big link between securing Britain's future oil supplies and Iraq.

Wilson said that his job making sure Britain has enough energy for the future is "not linked at all" to his work in Iraq as "they emerge from two different conversations I had with the prime minister. I see where you are going on this, but don't think it is true. There is reconstruction and there is long-term security of energy supply, particularly relating to Russia."

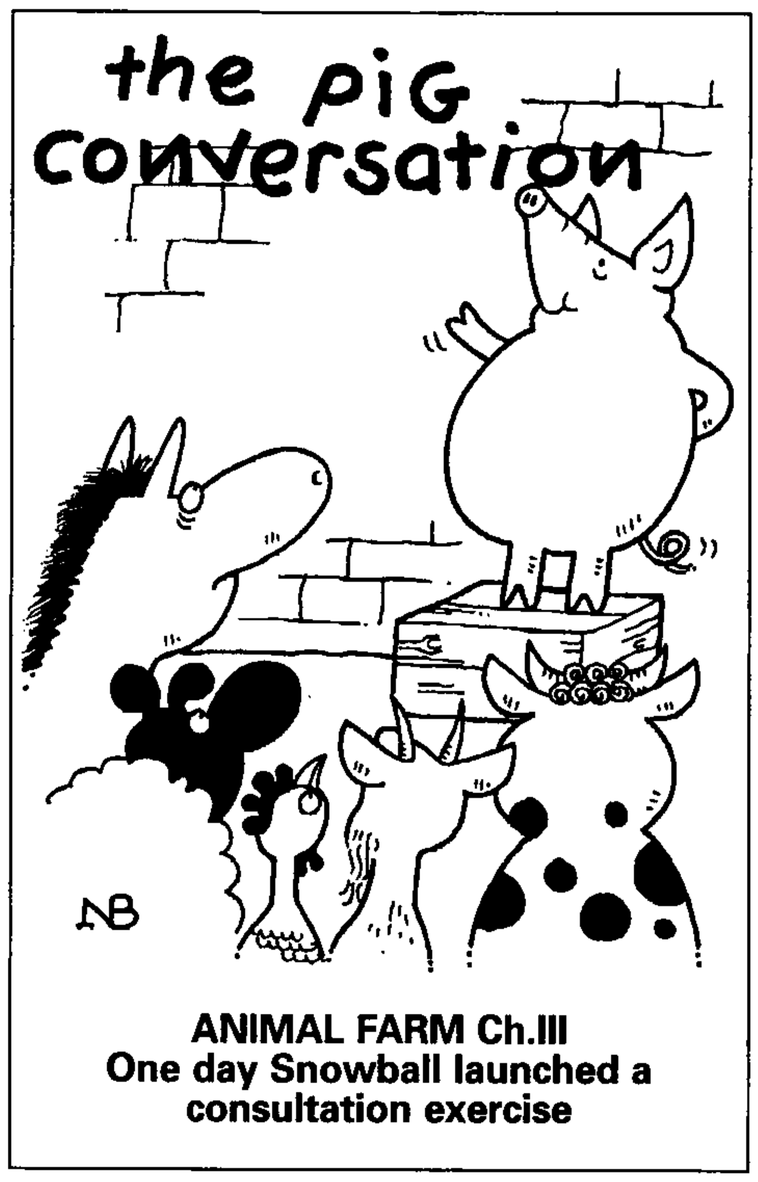
He added: "Obviously Iraq reconstruction has a big oil dimension — the sooner Iraq can fund itself from oil the better, for Iraqis as well." Number 10 said Wilson's energy role specifically related to Russia. Odd, then, that his first public appearance as energy envoy was in the Gulf. Last month he went to Saudi to witness the signing of a huge gas deal between Shell and the sheikhs.

This is a part time self-employed position and would suit house-wives or active pensioners who enjoy walking. Must be 13 years or over.

Isle of Thanet Gazette

BARELY a week into the "Big Conversation" and already the gremlins threaten to undermine Tony Blair's big PR exercise.

A cursory trawl of the web reveals a number "Big Conversation" sites, all taking the piss mightily out of the official one. Blame for this fiasco is being laid at the door of the party's assistant general-secretary Matt Carter, who was advised by party staffers to register all URL sites that might otherwise be taken by pranksters – and failed to do so.



ANIMAL FARM Ch.III
One day Snowball launched a consultation exercise

PROFESSOR Keith O'Nions, the scientist in charge of Britain's contribution to George Bush's crazy "son of Star Wars" programme, was last month put in charge of *all* Britain's academic scientific research too, when he became principal adviser on a £3bn research budget.

Sir Keith is already the ministry of defence's chief scientific adviser, with a £450m research budget to manage. He is also in charge of the "Missile Defence Centre", a unit set up last year by defence secretary Geoff Hoon to plough £30m of British money into Bush's folly. ("Son of Star Wars", which will use space-based projectiles and ray guns to shoot down ballistic missiles, threatens a new arms race even though most of its tests have failed dismally.)

As the MoD's main public face on questions about depleted uranium, Sir Keith is a busy man. But in November, that didn't stop trade and industry secretary Patricia Hewitt making him director-general of the research councils – principal adviser on spending and strategy for scientific research councils managing hundreds of millions in UK research funds.

THE Tories of Bedford have just selected a venture capitalist called Richard Fuller as their parliamentary candidate. If he wins the Labour-held marginal, he can look forward to a particularly warm welcome at Westminster from Conservative MP Gerald Howarth.

Back in the mid-1980s, when Fuller was national chairman of the dripping-wet Young Conservatives, Howarth launched a famous libel action against the BBC over the *Panorama* programme "Maggie's Militant Tendency". Howarth also sued Phil Pedley, a former YC chairman, whose report on "right-wing extremism" was the main source for *Panorama*'s allegations.

Who was Pedley's most stalwart defender and financial backer during the legal tussle with Gerald Howarth? Step forward Richard Fuller.

OPPOSITION to plans for top-up tuition fees are being led by Norwich North MP Ian Gibson, who was previously dean of biology at the University of East Anglia.

The university and its increasingly restless students are to be found in the Norwich South constituency of Gibson's neighbour, education secretary Charles "Fatty" Clarke, who bares special responsibility for dusting off the same plans rejected forcibly by David Blunkett when he was at education.

Meanwhile, for the first time in living memory Labour no longer controls Norwich city council. It is now in the hands of the Lib Dems who are making Clarke's seat one of their key targets.

WHEN the Conservative Party under Iain Duncan Smith took the surprising decision to oppose the government's introduction of student tuition fees, two shadow ministers were highly (if privately) critical. They were Eric Forth, shadow leader of the House, and Oliver Letwin, shadow home secretary.

Despite dumping IDS, the Tories are still wedded to this policy. Quite how they will be able to find the money to support higher education remains to be seen. Still, that will be a matter for the new shadow chancellor to resolve, a certain Oliver Letwin.

LABOUR party donor and health guru Chai Patel (see *Eyes passim*) should do very nicely out of the closure of the last military psychiatric hospital in the UK.

From 8 December military personnel will instead have access to the services of the celebs' favourite, the Priory Group, best known for its addiction treatment. Priory has of late been hoovering up public money with an estimated £60m a year of NHS work now reportedly going its way (even before the MoD contract was announced by minister Ivor Caplin last week).

Priory Group is headed by Dr Patel, who is also secretary to Tony Blair's favoured think-tank, the IPPR, which has backed both foundation hospitals and greater partnership between the NHS and private health providers. He is also non-executive chairman of Ukprocure, which has done very nicely from the government drive to encourage NHS to buy goods online.

THESE are tough times for Tory staff who have found Michael Howard's new broom unexpectedly sweeping them out of Conservative central office and into the Job Centre.

One casualty is ex-guardsman Mike Penning, the party's deputy head of news, who had played up his close association with the then leader for all it was worth to get himself selected as the prospective Conservative candidate for Hemel Hempstead. With immaculate bad timing he then produced 40,000 glossy leaflets for distribution to local residents, boasting of his connection with Mr Duncan Cough — only days before the leader was stabbed in the back.

After IDS's downfall, Penning told the *Hemel Hempstead Gazette* that "I will carry on doing my job exactly how I did when I was working for William Hague and he was replaced by Iain." Whoops! He now assures the *Gazette* that "I already planned to step down at Christmas."

LABOUR MP Diane Abbott's decision to send her son to a private school instead of the local comprehensive as she used to advise everyone else to do, earned her the ire of her local Hackney North constituency Labour party. But it's now sparked a ferocious fall out among parliamentary colleagues in the left-wing Campaign Group of MPs.

Some are now calling for her to be booted out of the group, their anger fuelled by Abbott's regular fawning appearances alongside Michael Portillo on Andrew Neill's late night politics programme.

DAVID Willetts, the Tory spokesman on work and pensions, also happens to be a paid adviser to the Dresdner Kleinwort Benson bank.

This means that "Two Jobs" (formerly known as "Two Brains") has to remind the House of his interest every time he tries to stick up for impoverished British pensioners who don't have a part-time job with a merchant bank to keep them ticking over.

Willetts' repeated attempts to demonstrate that the government isn't looking after pensioners might indeed be an effective attack on Labour. But they also sound like advertisements for more personal investment plans – which would greatly aid the, er, banking industry!

Consequently Two Jobs has to pepper his speeches with exciting phrases like "I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the register of members' interests" (15 October 2003); "I begin by drawing the House's attention to the relevant entries in the register of members' *interests" (11 June 2003)*; and the gripping "I begin by declaring the interests that appear in my entry in the register of members' interests" (10 April 2003).

Private Eye once tried to ask Willetts' office about this and was told: "It is none of your business and nothing to do with you." Willetts' spokesperson advised the *Eye* that "if you're thinking of writing a nasty little piece I should think again if I were you": the MP had checked his position thoroughly with the parliamentary sandards commissioner.

Indeed Willetts sticks to the rules and has even found a way to sometimes avoid the awkward reference to his other job: MPs need not declare their interest if they are making a supplementary question. Thus if a friendly MP (usually Gosport Tory Peter Viggers) opens a debate with a short bland question on pensions, Willetts can then wade in with long speeches about Labour tightfistedness and how people need to save hundreds of thousands of pounds if they want to avoid relying on means-tested benefits in retirement – without drawing attention to his work for Dresdner.

A Merry Christmas From The Health & Safety Executive

MORE shenanigans in Blaenau Gwent, which in an earlier incarnation as Ebbw Vale was represented in parliament by Aneurin Bevan and Michael Foot.

The 700-odd local Labour party members will later this week pick a candidate to replace the outgoing leftie and perennial thorn in the side of "new" Labour, Llew Smith (see *Eyes Passim*). Except that most of them won't bother if the recent shortlisting of "wimmin-only" candidates is anything to go by. Only 50 members turned up at a meeting to shortlist five candidates – including the favourite, the ultra-Blairite Unison official Maggie Jones, organised by Labour HQ – while around 70 members demonstrated outside.

Many of them smelt a rat and their suspicions were raised further when the favoured candidate Maggie Jones appeared on top table for a gala dinner hosted by Tony Blair in South Wales that coincided with the launch of his "Big Conversation".

All may not be lost for the furious comrades, however. Their local assembly member Peter Law, who many in the constituency thought would be their candidate, has threatened to run as an independent.

THE villain in the latest row over trade union recognition is not one of Britain's more familiar hard-faced employers but, er, one of our biggest unions.

The national executive of Amicus voted to de-recognise two GMB officials who represent staff working for Amicus. The GMB reps, Colin Adkins and Catherine Wells, had their credentials withdrawn after they expressed concern about the 20 percent pay increase awarded to Roger "Currant Bun" Lyons, general-secretary of MSF-Amicus (*Eyes passim*). A full-blown crisis was only averted when Amicus was forced to back down and apologise.

Wells and Adkins got into trouble after they pointed out that Lyons' pay increase would blow a hole in the union's pension fund, which would be depleted by some £500,000 following Currant Bun's retirement next year. Supporting the move to de-recognise the GMB were Paul Talbot and Bill Walsh, both Amicus assistant general-secretaries, as well as Lyons' close confidant Lucy Anderson, all of whom had also received similar inflation-busting pay increases recently.

The GMB went ballistic when informed of the de-recognition decision and wasted little time pointing out that such an uncomradely move would, were it ever to get in the public domain, severely undermine the campaign by Amicus to gain trade union recognition at companies such as BAe and Fujitsu. Forced to acknowledge that they had not thought things through, Anderson wrote a grovelling letter of apology and confirmed that the two full-time GMB officials would be welcomed back. The GMB accepted the apology in the interests of trade union unity, and in the hope that the matter would not cause any embarrassment by appearing in the press. So: don't tell anyone about it.

'Blackleg'

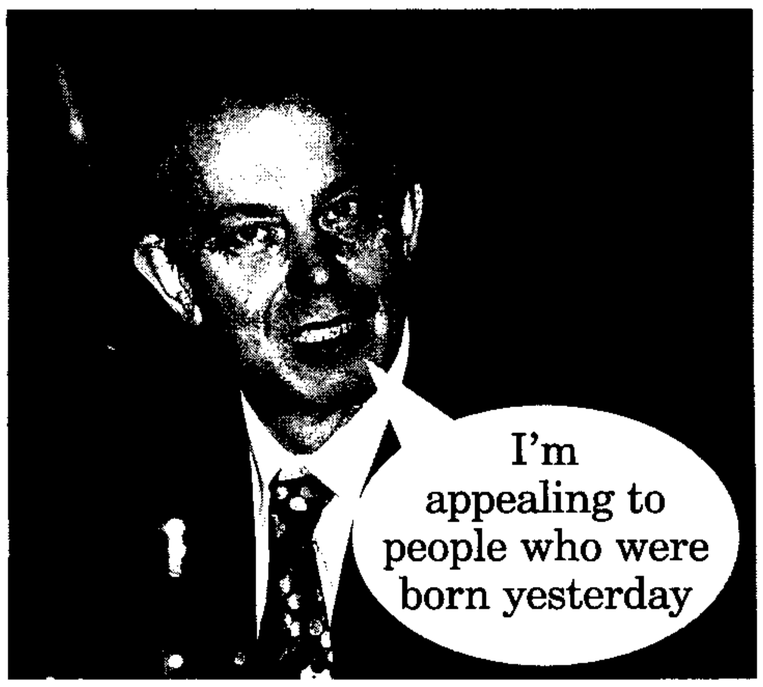
Warballs

"September 11th. Some think that dogs don't know about death, or remember our now dead friends. They are wrong. We remember. 'September 11th' by George Hall is available at 11"x14" and 16"x20"." — Advert in *New Yorker* for photo of dog, on sale for $375 framed or $275 unframed.

"For some women, handbags are like children. My friend Maggie remembers the exact date she bought her Marc Jacobs. 'It was 25 September 2001. It was post-9/11, and Giuliani was telling everyone to shop. I allowed myself to spend the $750 because I was doing my patriotic duty. It was good for the economy…' A good bag can unite the world… Does she ever use the Marc Jacobs? 'No,' she says, plaintively. 'I've moved on.'" — Ariel Leve, *Sunday Times* Style section.

"In three years that have seen the fall of the Twin Towers and the rise of *Pop Idol*, Corpus too has seen its own share of ups and downs." — Newsletter from Corpus Christi college, Cambridge.

VOTES AT 16?



DOWN ON THE FARM

FOR the past month there has only been one topic of conversation among Britain's pig-owning fraternity. The latest act of pure genius to emerge from the corporate mind of the department for the elimination of farming and rural affairs (Defra), with a little help from its friends in Brussels, is the need for pig owners to apply for a licence when they take their "pig for a walk".

Thumping on to the doormat of every pig owner in the country on 1 November came a leaflet on "New Pig Identification Rules", telling them how to comply with the new Pigs (Records, Identication and Movement) Order 2003.

Dutifully signed by that great rural affairs expert Ben Bradshaw, Defra regarded this as a further measure necessary to comply with EC directive 92/102.

What Ben and friends have come up with is a scheme firstly to ensure that every pig in the country is marked with its EC "herdmark", which can be recorded by means of a metal ear tag, a tattoo or a "slap mark". This must include "2 alpha characters followed by four digits", and the numbers of the slapped, tattooed or ear-ringed pigs must then be registered with Defra. Every time a pig moves off the "holding", all such numbers must be recorded, with the date and other relevant details; and all such records must be kept for six years, ready for inspection by any stray passing Defra official who has nothing better to do with his time than call in for a look at the paperwork.

What elevates Ben's order into one of the finest creations of the human imagination, however, is the section which begins with the words "If you take your pig for a walk, you must have a pet pig walking licence". This goes on to advise pig-lovers that their local animal health divisional office will issue one of these licences "at no charge".

Inevitably, however, there is a catch to such generosity. When you have got out the map and decided where you want to take your pig for a walk, you must then notify the ministry so that "a Defra veterinarian" can "visit you and inspect your proposed route". This is to ensure, Ben goes on, that "your pig does not come into contact with disease or possibly spread disease".

So excited has one Kent farmer, Ben Garratt, become at the thought of giving useful employment to Defra's team of veterinary officials (alas only at half-strength by the latest count) that he proposes farmers should celebrate by staging a "National Pig Walking Day". Thousands of pig-owners will simultaneously ring up Defra to ask for the services of an official to approve their proposed route. The countryside will soon be covered in Defra inspectors, earnestly checking every inch of path, field and stile, to ensure the piggies are only taken for walkies where Ben and his officials agree it is safe for them to do so.

How grateful we should all be that we have got such thoughtful gentlemen to cater for our every need.

'Muckspreader'

FWE TV

All New Top Of The Pops (BBC1)

TELEVISION has been obsessed for a decade with the concept of the makeover: Titch will sort out your water-feature for you, while Trinny and Tranny will show you how to make your tits seem bigger or smaller. But the medium has never been good at internal makeovers, by which we don't mean a surgical redesign show – *Kidney Swap With Robert Winston* – but attempts to give the programmes themselves a nip and tuck.

The recent attempted makeover of *Changing Places* was notably less successful than most carried out within the body of the show. And now the series hopefully billed as **All New Top Of The Pops** proves again that you can't turn an old nag at the gates of the knacker's yard into a thoroughbred simply by brushing its coat.

For its makeover, the rundown chart run-down has been handed to Andi Peters, previously one half of a presentational double-act with Ed The Duck but now a leading executive in music television. You certainly can't accuse Ed's old stooge of being a puppet executive: Andi has many ideas and they're all his own. The problem is the ideas don't work.

Let's start with the title. The formula *All New* comes from America where it's used to distinguish between new editions and repeats of series which are so popular the network wants them on all year. So, at a certain point following the summer hiatus, the American television press will suddenly trumpet *All New Friends* or *All New Simpsons*. The phrase should not be used, as Andi Peters just has, to pretend that a failing show has become a successful one.

If you're going to try such a desperate reinvention – and there are almost no examples in TV history of a failing show being turned round in that way – the only solution is to remove a programme from the schedules for a period, then return it with a flourish. In moving in the space of a week from *Dodgy Old Top Of The Pops* to *All New Top Of The Pops*, the BBC raised expectations and drew attention to its manoeuvres, effectively inviting viewers and critics to play a game of spot the difference.

"The shop had a 3 for 1 offer"

The main change is in presentation: the show is now live. This is a classic cheap way in TV of trying to give the proceedings some edge; but it's rather contradicted by allowing acts to mime: a habit which helped to give the series a bad reputation.

As-it-happens, transmission also puts extra pressure on the presenters. The old system of using Radio 1 hosts on a rotational system even bigger than Chelsea FC's has been abandoned by Peters in favour of Tim Kash, a young MTV video-jock who will front *ANTOTP* (as it won't become catchily known) for 46 weeks of the year, assuming it lasts that long. It might be worth checking out Kash again in around week 36 but, for the moment he seems fazed by the larger stage.

The other innovation – of being less dependent on the singles chart – is sensible at a time when most people download their music; but it comes out as a classic BBC compromise in which the show is horribly vague about admitting whether a track comes from an album or is a future release. Like William Hague in a baseball cap, *ANTOTP* is trying to appeal to too many constituencies.

The failure of the makeover is not entirely the fault of Andi Peters, who was pretty much Ed-The-Ducked from the start. Ratings for *Top Of The Pops* have declined for two reasons. The first is that, until a few years ago, most people who wanted to see a group's new video had to wait until the BBC's music show exclusively showed it. Now there's 24-hour multi-channel pop TV available and, by the Friday of the week of the release, most kids could shout out the camera script.

That Friday night showing is the other problem. Since *TOTP* was moved from its historical Thursday slot into a place the following day which put it into direct collision with *Coronation Street*, audiences have dipped alarmingly. The show would have been affected anyway by the contraction in the singles market and pop-telly competition; but the BBC made it worse by throwing the show to the sharky waters of a soap-slot.

Even the dimmest member of a boy-band could work out what the solution probably was; but Andi Peters was left to just jiggle about decoratively in the background of a failing show. A show which demonstrates chart direction with arrows should have one pointing irrevocably downwards beside its own title.

'Remote Controller'

AD NAUSEAM

FEW ads this year have garnered as much press attention as the Adidas commercial where David Beckham and new rugby deity Jonny Wilkinson attempt to learn each other's speciality with the round and oval balls — the free kick and the place kick.

The ad was shot at Mottram Hall Hotel in Cheshire; and although the pair appear to be getting on swimmingly, in fact David Beckham only turned up for a couple of hours in the morning. For the rest of the ad — the long shots and the pans — Adidas employed a Beckham clone.

At the time of the shoot Jonny Wilkinson had not yet won the world cup and so was not deemed important enough to be granted a body double. He stayed out in the cold kicking footballs all day.

LAST issue's comments on the current Barnardo's campaign attracted a sizeable mailbag, but nothing like as sizeable as the complaints sack at the ASA. The press ads, created by Bartle Bogle Hegarty, have now received more criticism than any other campaign this year, with 445 letters so far.

As we said last issue, this will not bother Barnardo's or BBH in the slightest — a storm of protest is still a loud noise, bringing priceless media attention to both charity and agency (see Letters).

Barnardo's has since augmented the campaign by running a full-page, open letter from the charity's chief executive Roger Singleton in several Sunday newspapers. In it he justifies the shock tactics saying cockroaches and needles in babies' mouths are necessary to "draw attention to the fact that poverty still seriously damages the lives and prospects of some children in this country".

However, a survey carried out by OMD Snapshots in the wake of the furore suggests the ads did nothing of the kind. The survey showed that 62.5 percent of correspondents were not shocked by the images, and that they would have no impact on whether people would donate to Barnardo's.

CHUCKLES in the drinks industry at the fate of Bacardi which, with Christmas upon us, put out its usual TV campaign featuring Vinnie Jones and friends getting tanked up on the rum.

Alas, just as the ad was appearing on screen Jones was getting himself arrested on assault charges after an "air rage" incident. Police also charged Jones — who amusingly gave his occupation as actor — with being drunk on board an aircraft and using abusive language.

SOMEONE at *hotline*, the Virgin Trains onboard promotional magazine, must have a sense of humour.

Why else feature a review of the Manic Street Preachers' CD, *Forever Delayed*?

THE OUTLOOK IS GLOOMY...
THERE'S A COMING DEPRESSION...
WITH NOTHING BUT GREY CLOUDS AHEAD
"Sorry – NO Greyat The" BBC
Dear Fish, You're Sacked. love, The BBC
KenPyne

MEDIA NEWS

BBC Three's controller Stuart Murphy says he decided to junk the only distinctive show on the channel, *Liquid News*, because "BBC Three is a constantly evolving channel and tough decisions have to be made to make it constantly refresh its output to best serve the audience".

But with the "face of the channel" Johnny Vaughan already departed long before its first anniversary and football matches being drafted in to boost an audience share of just 0.5 percent (and that's in houses that *can* receive it), just how far has the channel evolved from the remit agreed by culture secretary Tessa Jowell before its launch?

In the autumn of 2001, when Jowell threw out Murphy's plans as not distinctive enough from the BBC's satellite rivals, Murphy promised to produce "intelligent and original entertainment and drama" and pronounced himself "determined to avoid… the tacky boobs-and-bums approach of many entertainment channels".

And how has that worked in practice? The week of 29 November to 5 December featured *Jordan: a Model Mum*, a documentary following the chesty page 3 girl, and *Casino*, a "broad overview of Las Vegas' sex industry". Highlights from the rest of the week included *Desirability*, the tale of a man who "overcame physical disadvantage to become a porn star", *Love for Sale*, "a visit to two Nevada brothels", and, er, *Jordan: The Truth About Me*.

The rest of the channel's four hours a night were filled almost entirely with shows that have either been shown on BBCs 1 or 2 (*EastEnders, Top of The Pops 2, Gimme Gimme Gimme)* or would be before the week was out (*What Not To Wear, Little Britain*). Of original drama there was no sign.

THE BBC's "Making It Happen" initiative continues to pile up exactly the sort of crap chairman Greg Dyke has promised to cut.

The latest wheeze is to present "Values Awards". Not to people who, say, make good programmes, but to those who embody the "behaviours" associated with ideals that sum up "everything we aspire to be".

"We want to recognise people who adopt and embody the Values. In March 2004, the first ever BBC-wide Values Awards will take place. Open to all staff in the BBC, these awards will provide an opportunity to identify and applaud individuals nominated by the divisions who translate the paper values into action and behaviour."

ONE of these values, according to the "One BBC" corporate website, is to "challenge systems, processes and people that block collaboration". But preserving this "external unity", as it is known, is getting tougher as more of the corporation is hived off to private companies.

The Beeb's accounting system has been farmed out to Medas, its property and facilities management to Land Securities Trillium and now BBC Technology Ltd is up for grabs too, with IBM named as a possible buyer.

THOSE who accuse the BBC of dumbing down will have been heartened by BBC Radio Five Live's attempts to beef up coverage of Westminster politics.

Following one of the new "watering hole" brain-storming sessions, Five Live hacks came up with "a big day at Westminster", an interactive, day-long package. Described as "groundbreaking", it featured a "big online vote" to reveal "the UK's sexiest MP". Listeners were also asked to decide "which of our broadcasters would make the best Prime Minister?"

As usual on Five Live, sport took pride of place, however: "In a first for Five Live, we're sending back live pictures from a mobile phone at the 5-a-side match between Five Live listeners and MPs".

ALLAN LITTLE, one of the Beeb's most respected reporters, has fallen foul of the style police at BBC News.

A stylist has been sent specially to the Paris office to work on Little's trousers which are, by all accounts, far too baggy.

Tighter trousers are not the only sign of the times. Reporters have been coached in using hand gestures to enhance their authority: "open hand, palm towards camera and point hand towards graphic" or, to make the viewer feel even more "included", "hands together, palms towards body, then open to embrace position".

The result is that all reporters now use all the same hand movements all the time, regardless of the story.

REPORTING on Lynne Truss's bestselling book of punctuation horrors, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, the BBC's *London News* went on to the capital's streets to test the punctuation skills of members of the public.

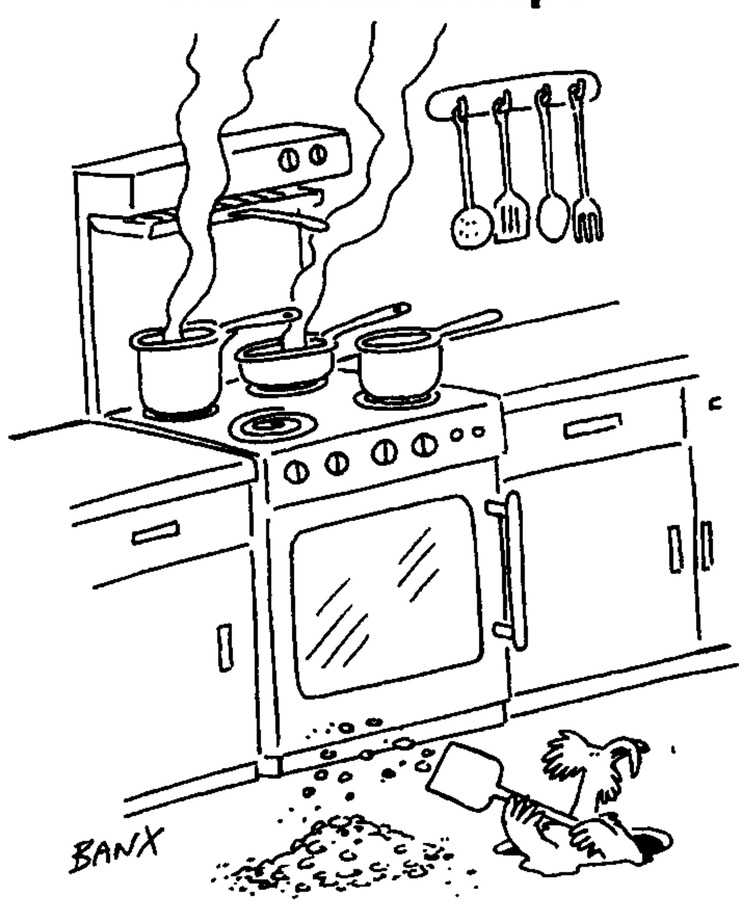
The BBC newsroom then gave everyone the correct answers on screen. Unfortunately, this was headlined: GRAMMER TEST.

GOING LIVE

***BBC Breakfast* went live to somewhere called Betty's Bakery on 1 December to talk to a worker about flexible hours.**

Unfortunately, the worker who was interviewed worked a fixed 0530 to 1330 shift.

The Great Escape



CEEFUX

Raeding scheme encourages bookworms 337.

— ITV Teletext, 23 November.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which European language do the words Blitz, Kindergarten and Angst come from?
Contestant: Italian.
Robinson: Which country has the largest number of Portuguese speakers in the world?
Contestant: Spain.
Robinson: Which celebrity chef, whose first name begins with an "H" has the surname "Fearnley-Whittingstall"?
Contestant: Rick Stein.

DUMB AMERICA

The Tonight Show With Jay Leno

Jay Leno: Who was the "Lady" who rode naked through the streets of Coventry?
Contestant 1: Queen Elizabeth?
Contestant 2: Lady Di?

I-SKY

"Ozzy Osbourne's wife Sharon is set to become the queen of British day-time telly next year. The 49-year-old's US chat show has been snapped up by Sky One for a lunchtime slot… Sky One viewers will also get to see Tony Blair's appearance on *The Simpsons* in January. *Angel*, *Star Trek: Enterprise*, *Mile High* and *Dream Team* are all back for new series."

— "News" story in *Sun*, 5 December.

"This is how we think footie hero David Beckham will look for a guest appearance in *The Simpsons*… Becks will follow in the footsteps of a string of top celebrities when he appears — including Tony Blair. The PM recorded a voice over last month for an episode to be shown on Sky One on 9 January."

— "News" story in *Sun*, 5 December.

The IDS Doll Club
Conservatory, Quality Hotel,
Riverway, Wigan.
7:30 pm Meets first Wednesday in the month.
What's On In Wigan

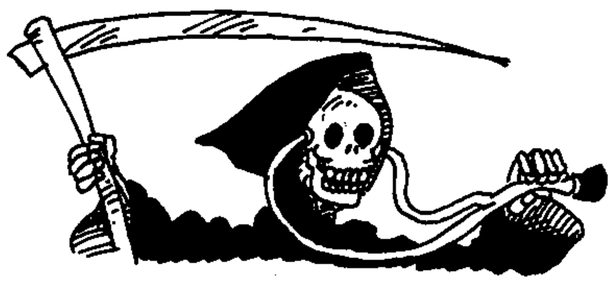
PEOPLE working in the noble trade of PR have surprisingly thin skins, to judge by a motion before the next National Union of Journalists conference.

The motion, from a group of delicate PR flowers, condemns the use by hacks of the "inappropriate and offensive" term "spin doctor" to describe those in public relations. It has been proposed by the union's Public Relations and Information Industrial Council, aka PRIIC, the second "I" of which is of course silent.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

AGENCY PARTY!
ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS MY TWO FRONT TEETH...
...THEY FELL OUT WHEN I HAD THE COLLAGEN IMPLANTS, CHIN TUCK, AND BOTOX AROUND MY GUMS.



DOING THE ROUNDS

THE Council for the Regulation of Healthcare Professionals (CRaP) started work in April to "exercise independent oversight" over the General Medical Council and eight other regulatory bodies for nurses, pharmacists, dentists, opticians, osteopaths, midwives, chiropractors and health visitors.

Alas, it has no remit to look into the performance of the vast army of NHS managers, who are curiously not considered to be healthcare professionals. A key recommendation of the Kennedy inquiry was for managers to be as regulated as the rest of the NHS workforce, given that all the recent disasters in the NHS have had a failure of management at their core. And yet they remain as unregulated as crystal therapists. North Bristol trust, for example, is £44m in debt due to crap management. Patients and staff will suffer but no one is accountable.

CRaP's first big challenge is to decide on a procedure for referring a healthcare professional (not a manager) to court under "section 29" if it is felt that the regulatory body has been too lenient or further action is necessary. Earlier this year, Dr Freda Mulhem was jailed for eight months after admitting responsibility for instructing a junior to mistakenly inject the chemotherapy drug vincristine into a teenage patient's spine, rather than vein. The patient died.

Chief medical officer Liam Donaldson wants to end "the climate of blame, acrimony and confrontation" that follows medical cock-ups, pointing out that the system is often more at fault than the individual. Lack of training, supervision and sleep, poor labelling and storage and unfamiliar surroundings all contribute to error. But the "no-blame" culture doesn't wash either. Just as most of us take a calculated risk when we drive through a red light, many doctors take shortcuts and crash clinical red-lights because they think they can get away with it.

The scale of medical cock-up is huge in all health systems (100,000 Americans die each year from preventable errors). In the UK, it's estimated that the preventable death toll is around 40,000 a year with as many as 1.4m injured. Clearly, if everyone who cocked up was in prison on a manslaughter charge, we wouldn't have a health service.

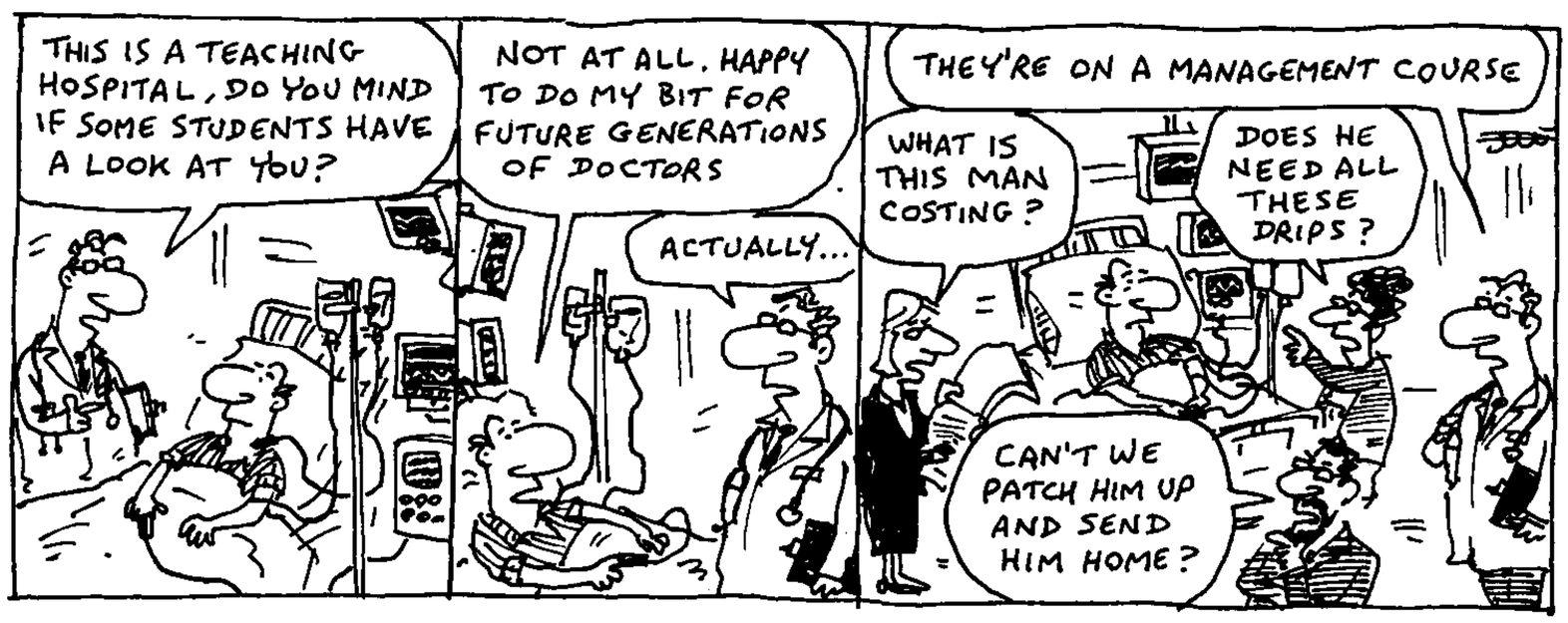
What's needed to protect patients is not 19 of the great and the good sticking their heads up their arses in a posh office in London but independent quality control on the ground in hospitals and GP surgeries, picking up and preventing basic clinical errors that occur everyday. Sporadic inspections from the centrally-based Commission for Health Improvement, the Modernisation Agency, the National Clinical Assessment Authority or the National Patient Safety Agency will make little difference.

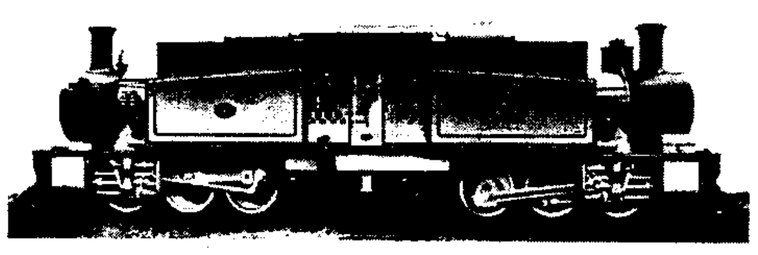
Ironically, having set up 31 health watchdogs and quangos employing nearly 20,000 staff, Labour has now ordered a review of "how efficiently they are running" and, absurdly given the time taken up by multiple inspections, "whether they reduce demands on frontline services". At least it'll give CRaP something to talk about.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


THIS IS A TEACHING HOSPITAL, DO YOU MIND IF SOME STUDENTS HAVE A LOOK AT YOU?
NOT AT ALL. HAPPY TO DO MY BIT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS OF DOCTORS
ACTUALLY...
THEY'RE ON A MANAGEMENT COURSE
WHAT IS THIS MAN COSTING?
DOES HE NEED ALL THESE DRIPS?
CAN'T WE PATCH HIM UP AND SEND HIM HOME?



SIGNAL FAILURES

Health and inefficiency

DISRUPTION of epic proportions this month will illustrate the problem of using the health and safety executive (HSE) to oversee rail safety.

Closing sections of four mainlines for maintenance between Christmas and new year should ensure workers are safe. But it will expose thousands of travellers to greater risks on the roads. Many will be bundled into buses and others will make their entire journey by road to avoid the hassle. But if anyone dies in a road accident, the HSE won't care because it covers only railways.

It didn't take Alan Osborne long to realise the shortcomings of the HSE's attitude to railways. He resigned as the HSE's rail-safety director in October, after less than a year in the job, and complained in a statement leaked to the *Economist* that the HSE is dysfunctional and treats railways as comparable to nuclear and chemical plants.

The HSE often appears to be trying to eliminate all railway risks, rather than accepting the smaller risks on the grounds that rail is already safer than the alternatives.

For example, in mainland Europe barrow crossings (boardwalks over the tracks) are the normal route to platforms at secondary stations; but here the HSE refuses to weigh the risks of barrow crossings against the alternatives. Even on the rural Heart of Wales line, which has four slow trains each day, two stations have lost barrow crossings and ramped bridges costing more than £500,000 have been installed to maintain access for disabled people and others.

At other stations no ramp is available to compensate for lost barrow crossings; some travellers can't reach the trains while others tackle footbridge steps. But the HSE's own figures show station steps are the biggest hazard away from moving trains. Last year trips on steps and escalators accounted for 1,199 casualties (64 percent of "non-movement incidents"), including two deaths.

The railway inspectorate was shifted from the transport department to the HSE by the Tories so ministers wouldn't be held accountable for rail accidents. Today's ministers also like the freedom to blame others. That attitude has trickled down through the HSE into the rail companies themselves, trapping innovation in a logjam of "risk aversion" (jargon for arse covering).

This Kafkaesque nightmare has engulfed attempts at a low-cost rail service between Stourbridge Town and Stourbridge Junction, Worcestershire, on a self-contained line less than a mile long. The shuttle service now uses a train that spends twice as long stationary as moving. In 1999 the regional transport authority decided to start a Sunday service using a Parry people mover, a 30ft tram powered by a Ford Focus engine. The rail industry demanded the full monty of "safety case" documentation, although no other train would share the track. Tests began in June 2002 and so far there have been more than 100 meetings and 2,500 items of correspondence, plus input from six different consultants. Stourbridge still has no Sunday rail service and a normal train is tied up on the wasteful weekday shuttle for the foreseeable future.

PS: Network Rail and the "strategic" rail authority say closing lines outright is a more efficient way to maintain tracks than using rail's equivalent of a motorway contraflow. This theory first went into practice on a grand scale last summer when the west-coast mainline in Staffordshire closed for 17 weeks. Alas, there was a cock-up and another week's closure was announced hours before the 17 weeks were up (*Eye* 1091). Now NR wants to close part of the same line again for a "deep dig" to tackle drainage problems under the track — which should have been sorted out during that "efficient" summer closure.

BACKERS of London's east-west Crossrail tunnel have launched a "young Crossrail" website and newsletter for children. This may be an astute move. Given the progress Crossrail has made since the 1980s, thanks to political indecision and treasury parsimony, the decision to build Crossrail may well be taken by today's six-year-olds when they've become middle-aged civil servants and MPs.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS

OH HOW LOVELY!! LOOK! THEY'VE DECORATED THE STATION...
...WITH FESTIVE CANCELLATION NOTICES
NO THIS TRAINS XMAS
BUS REPLACEMENT SERVICES →
SEVERE DISRUPTION EXPECTED
Grizelda

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

DOUBLE JEOPARDY

MORE on hapless publican Geoff Monks (*Eyes passim*), sentenced by Northamptonshire magistrates to 120 days in jail for being in possession of an offensive slice of ham (*Eyes passim*).

It was a year ago that Monks found himself in Woodhill prison in a cell above Soham murders suspect Ian Huntley because he was unable to pay fines and costs totalling £19,800 arising out of his conviction in 1999 for food safety offences. Readers will recall that Monks was prosecuted after environmental health officers from East Northants district council (ENDC) allegedly found mouldy ham and pork in the kitchen at his pub, the Snooty Fox at Lowick, and that unprecedented fines and costs of £31,800, reduced on appeal, *were imposed* even though the council failed to provide any scientific or photographic evidence of mouldy meat.

The prosecution was triggered by a complaint from a customer who said she had suffered food poisoning — coincidentally on the same day she had been barred from the pub for creating a scene in the bar. The customer, "flamboyant" local solicitor Jenny Lawrence, was later tape-recorded boasting of friendships with a senior figure on ENDC and with local magistrates.

The Snooty prosecution, and further frivolous prosecutions at two other pubs he owned, left Monks financially ruined and with a heart condition. He has had to sell all three inns, even though the cases against his other two pubs were kicked out by a judge as an "abuse of process". The judge also noted that, out of some 7,000 inspections of food premises carried out by ENDC over 10 years, only four had resulted in prosecutions — three of which were against Geoff Monks!

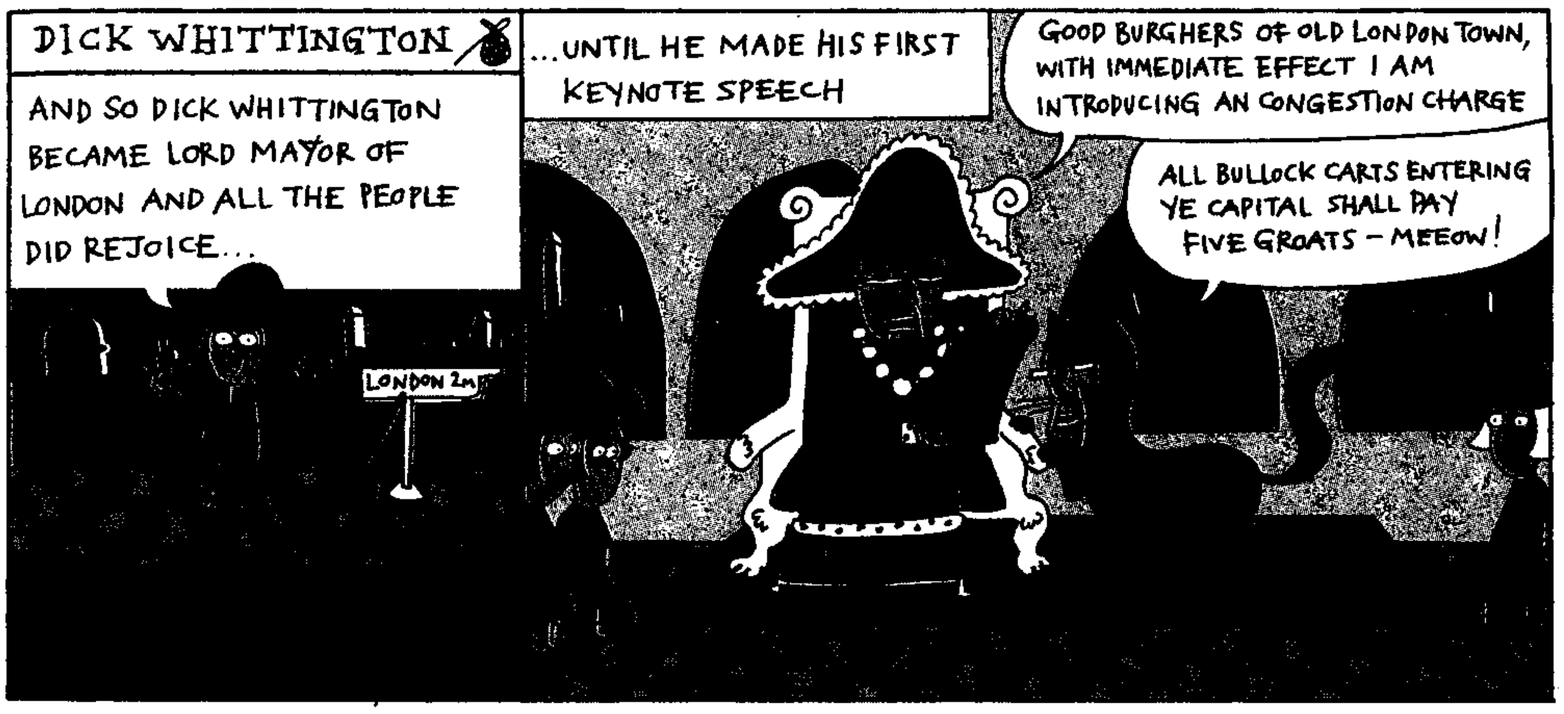
In an interview with the *Eye* in September, ENDC's chief executive Stephen Baker pooh-poohed any idea of a conspiracy. Monks's misfortune had been of his own making. Public servants had simply been doing their jobs, etc, etc. However, correspondence seen by the *Eye* reveals just how closely the court and council work together… with one court officer even giving the council public relations advice.

On 6 June this year Neil Clarke, clerk to Northamptonshire magistrates, wrote to Neil Pritchard, ENDC solicitor, confirming that although Monks was jailed at a hearing he had requested in an attempt to have his unpaid fines *and costs* remitted, the magistrates had technically imprisoned him only on account of the £13,500 fines element — therefore leaving it open for the council to have another pop at him for the £8,300 costs.

Wrote Clarke: "It is my view that the court which committed Mr Monks to prison in respect of the outstanding fines ought perhaps to have enforced the costs simultaneously… You will be aware that this was not done, and it would therefore appear that Mr Monks will soon be released from prison only to face additional substantial debt… this may… come as a surprise / shock to him. Given the publicity surrounding this case and the false impression that abounds regarding the way it has been administered you may consider that it would be better dealt with by way of a write-off. This would prevent the unmerited accusation of 'witch-hunt'. However… should you… wish enforcement action to be taken against Mr Monks, then this court will proceed on that basis. It would be for your own offices [*sic*] to handle the issue of not only being in the right but also appearing so to be."

ENDC opted for the witch-hunt. A summons was issued and Monks will be back in Kettering magistrates court at 10am on Thursday 11 December, with the possibility of a jail sentence as his Christmas present for the second year running. It will be for East Northants' officers to "handle the issue" of not only being in the wrong but also "appearing to be" a heartless and vindictive bunch of bastards.

GRIM PANTO


DICK WHITTINGTON
AND SO DICK WHITTINGTON BECAME LORD MAYOR OF LONDON AND ALL THE PEOPLE DID REJOICE...
LONDON 2m
...UNTIL HE MADE HIS FIRST KEYNOTE SPEECH
GOOD BURGHERS OF OLD LONDON TOWN, WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT I AM INTRODUCING AN CONGESTION CHARGE
ALL BULLOCK CARTS ENTERING YE CAPITAL SHALL PAY FIVE GROATS – MEEOW!

NICE WARK

LAST year the audit commission's comprehensive performance assessment summed up Southwark's provision of services as "weak". Despite this, recent accounts reveal that council chief executive Bob Coomber received a £20,000 bonus, personally agreed by council leader Nick Stanton, taking his annual salary to £150,000.

Coomber isn't the only one coining it. The council currently pays 450 managers more than £40,000 a year each. Meanwhile the ruling "executive" agreed a package of increases totalling £80,000, which will see the annual members' bill break the £1m barrier for the first time. The main beneficiaries were the nine Lib Dem "executive" members who each got a £5,000 increase, taking their council income to £37,339 a year — still some £14,000 less than Stanton.

This pay bonanza in the London borough has dismayed 200 of the borough's teachers and education staff, who last year were denied annual increments by the council's disastrous former "education provider", W S Atkins (*Eyes passim*). With Atkins gone, they had expected to be paid what they were owed — amounting to a relatively paltry £80,000 on the council wages bill. But with big pay rises for councillors and senior managers taking priority, they have been told the council doesn't have the money.

● PERHAPS Southwark's teachers should move to Wales. Plaid Cymru-controlled Rhondda Cynon Taff council is advertising for a "senior photocopying assistant" at up to £20,469 pa — almost £3,000 more than a newly qualified teacher gets and nearly £4,000 more than a nurse with three years' training.

HORRID TORRIDGE

FOLLOWING this summer's audit commission review condemning Torridge district council in north Devon for "widespread and persistent bullying" (*Eye* 1083), an "independent" inquiry team set up by the council has now released its findings.

It puts most blame on the "unhappy" working relationship between two men who have now left the council: former leader Mervyn Lane and former chief executive Richard Brasington. The report coyly avoids naming them, merely referring to them by job title. Nor does it name a senior manager and several councillors, still on board, who have been blamed for "inappropriate behaviour" (the report's euphemism for bullying).

The reluctance to name names, and the fact that members of the public must pay a swingeing £10 for a copy of the report, has irritated council taxpayers. The inquiry chairman, local barrister Jeremy Roe, told a council meeting that Lane, who stood down on grounds of ill-health in September, was a man with "no great management skills" and that "shouting, swearing and browbeating" were generally thought to be "unacceptable" — although Lane does not accept that he did anything wrong.

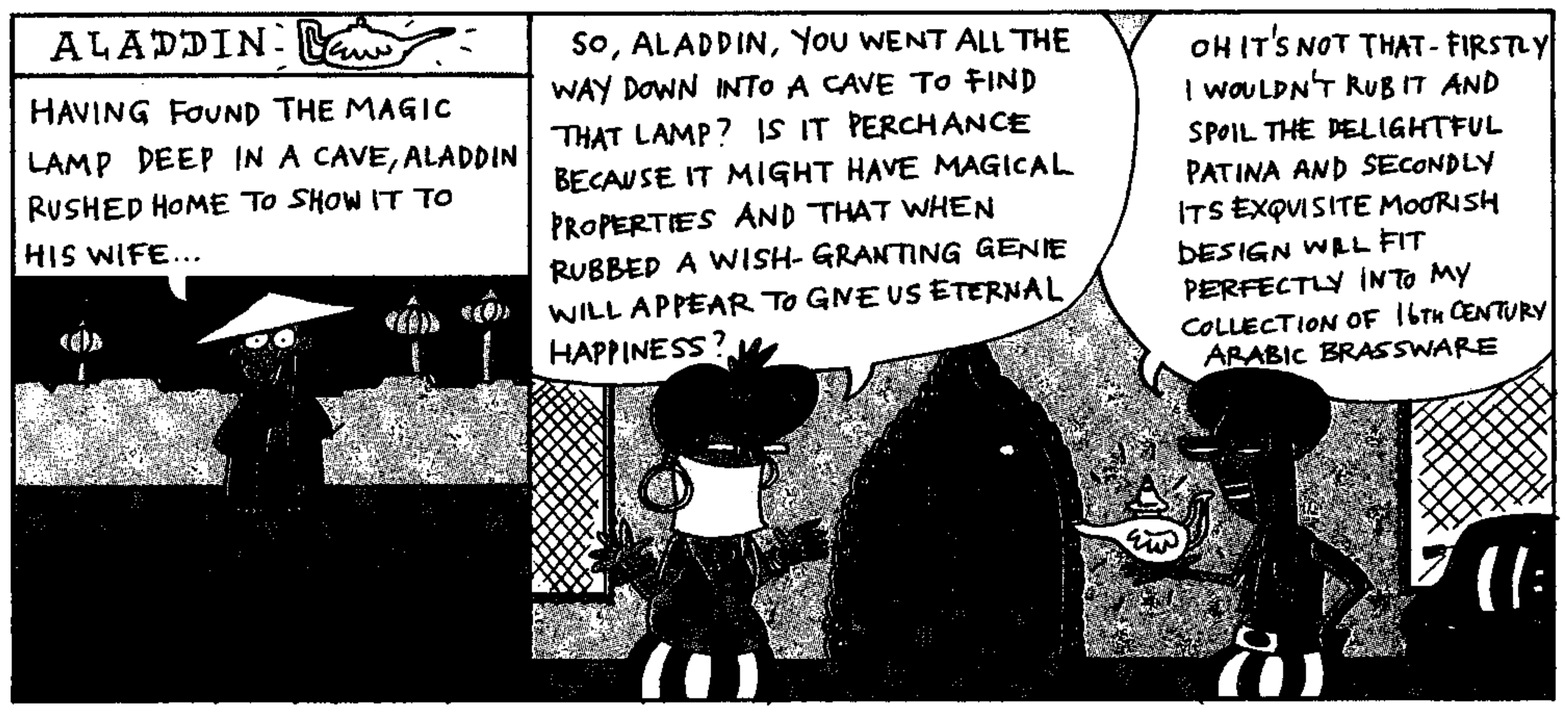
And what of Anthony Hosegood, TDC's environmental services contracts manager, who hanged himself last year, according to a coroner, because of "stress at work"? The report deals with this sensitive issue by ignoring it completely.

● THE Rotten Boroughs award for Outstanding Contribution to Community Relations 2003 goes to Steve Elway, Gloucester city council's "executive manager, culture, learning and leisure". After the evacuation of 90 residents, many of them Muslims, to a leisure centre as police searched "terror suspect" Sajid Badat's home on 27 November, Mr Elway told the BBC: "They're being well looked after. They've been given bacon and sausage sandwiches."

Number crunching

£3,000 pa
■ Limit on government's proposed top-up fees

£3,000 pa
■ Average student debt under current system


ALADDIN
HAVING FOUND THE MAGIC LAMP DEEP IN A CAVE, ALADDIN RUSHED HOME TO SHOW IT TO HIS WIFE...
SO, ALADDIN, YOU WENT ALL THE WAY DOWN INTO A CAVE TO FIND THAT LAMP? IS IT PERCHANCE BECAUSE IT MIGHT HAVE MAGICAL PROPERTIES AND THAT WHEN RUBBED A WISH-GRANTING GENIE WILL APPEAR TO GIVE US ETERNAL HAPPINESS?
OH IT'S NOT THAT - FIRSTLY I WOULDN'T RUB IT AND SPOIL THE DELIGHTFUL PATINA AND SECONDLY ITS EXQUISITE MOORISH DESIGN WILL FIT PERFECTLY INTO MY COLLECTION OF 16TH CENTURY ARABIC BRASSWARE

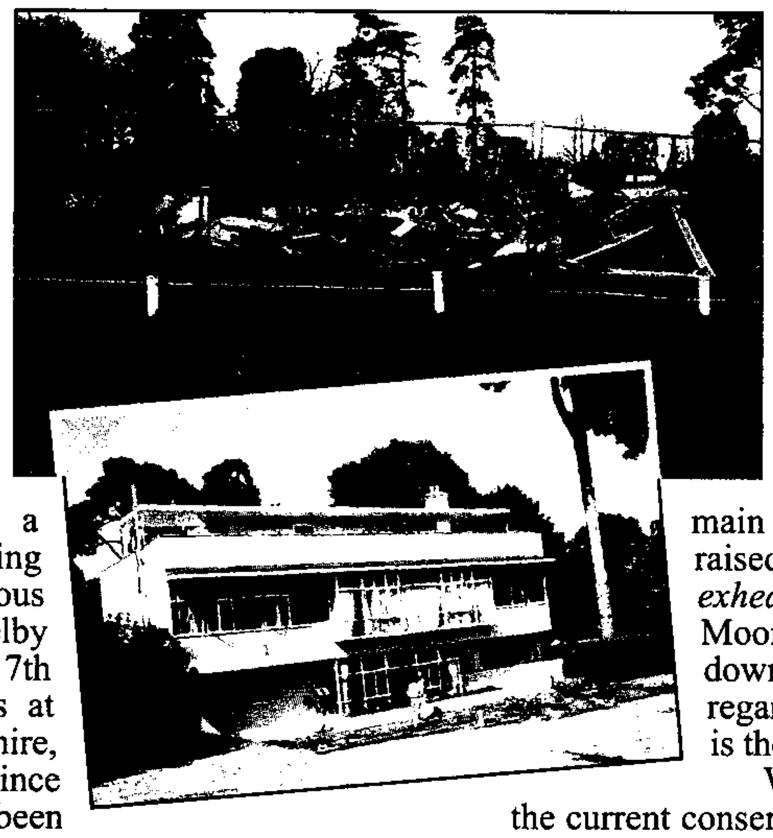
NOOKS and CORNERS

R.I.P. Greenside. It might seem surprising that the demise of a 1930s flat-roofed concrete house in Surrey undermines the safety of every historic building in Britain, but it does.

In *Eye* 1074 I discussed the case of this famous, listed, pioneer-of-the-Modern-Movement house of 1937 by Connell, Ward & Lucas which was then threatened by the cavalier willingness of Runnymede district council to grant listed building consent for demolition to oblige its avaricious owner, David Beadle.

The decision was successfully challenged by the Twentieth Century Society in the high court. But mere legality does not impress Surrey. In defiance of the advice of its own planning officers, let alone English Heritage, the councillors of Runnymede again voted to grant listed building consent for demolition, even though Greenside is just the sort of stylish and unusual house which, elsewhere, would be restored and cherished.

Under the law, however, this grant of listed building consent requires the endorsement of the secretary of state and a public inquiry would probably have followed. But Mr Beadle couldn't wait: he bulldozed his house two weeks ago.



This is the worst case of the illegal — *criminal* — destruction of a listed historic building since the egregious Sir Bruno Welby demolished the 17th century almshouses at Denton, Lincolnshire, with impunity. Since then, the law has been toughened. But Mr Beadle's lawyers argue that the legal obligation to maintain a listed building infringes their wretched client's human rights. In fact the 2000 human rights act does *not* override listed building law — just as it does not allow a burglar to exercise his human right to empty your house.

Nevertheless, unless this architectural thuggery is challenged, a dangerous precedent will have been set and no listed building of whatever date will be safe. So if Runnymede fails to prosecute Mr Beadle (which is highly likely), English Heritage has insisted it will. Hooray.

This genteel thug should be hit where it hurts and fined heavily. He should also be prevented from building a new house on the site of Greenside next to Wentworth golf course, for under green belt legislation a new development is normally only permitted if it is a replacement dwelling. Because of Mr Beadle's illegal action, there is no dwelling to replace. The important thing is that David Beadle should not be allowed to make a profit from his crime — for crime it is.

THE Ashmolean Museum at Oxford is a grade I listed building, yet this most sophisticated Classical masterpiece of the 1840s by Charles Robert Cockerell is (again) threatened with unsympathetic alterations.

Not content with recent alterations to what is a great national cultural monument, the go-ahead director Christopher Pink [*Eyes passim ad nauseam*] wants to create new gallery space designed by the fashionable American minimalist-modernist Rick Mather. This will involve destroying the galleries added to Cockerell's original building by H.W. Moore in 1889-94 and will cost a mere £46m.

Moore's additions might seem rather more interesting and appropriate than the new spaces proposed by Mr Mather, but that is not my concern. Both the conservation plan commissioned from Mr Mather and the utterances of the director emphasise that Cockerell's original work is now regarded as sacrosanct. This admirable attitude did not, however, prevent Mr Mauve from erecting gratuitous flagpoles for the permanent display of banners in front of the magnificent front of the Ashmolean. Nor does it preclude Mr Mather proposing the removal of the steps Cockerell designed immediately inside the main entrance. These lead up to a raised floor which originally led to an *exhedra* which was later removed by Moore (who replaced it with steps down). These steps may now be regarded as inconvenient, but the fact is they are original and by Cockerell.

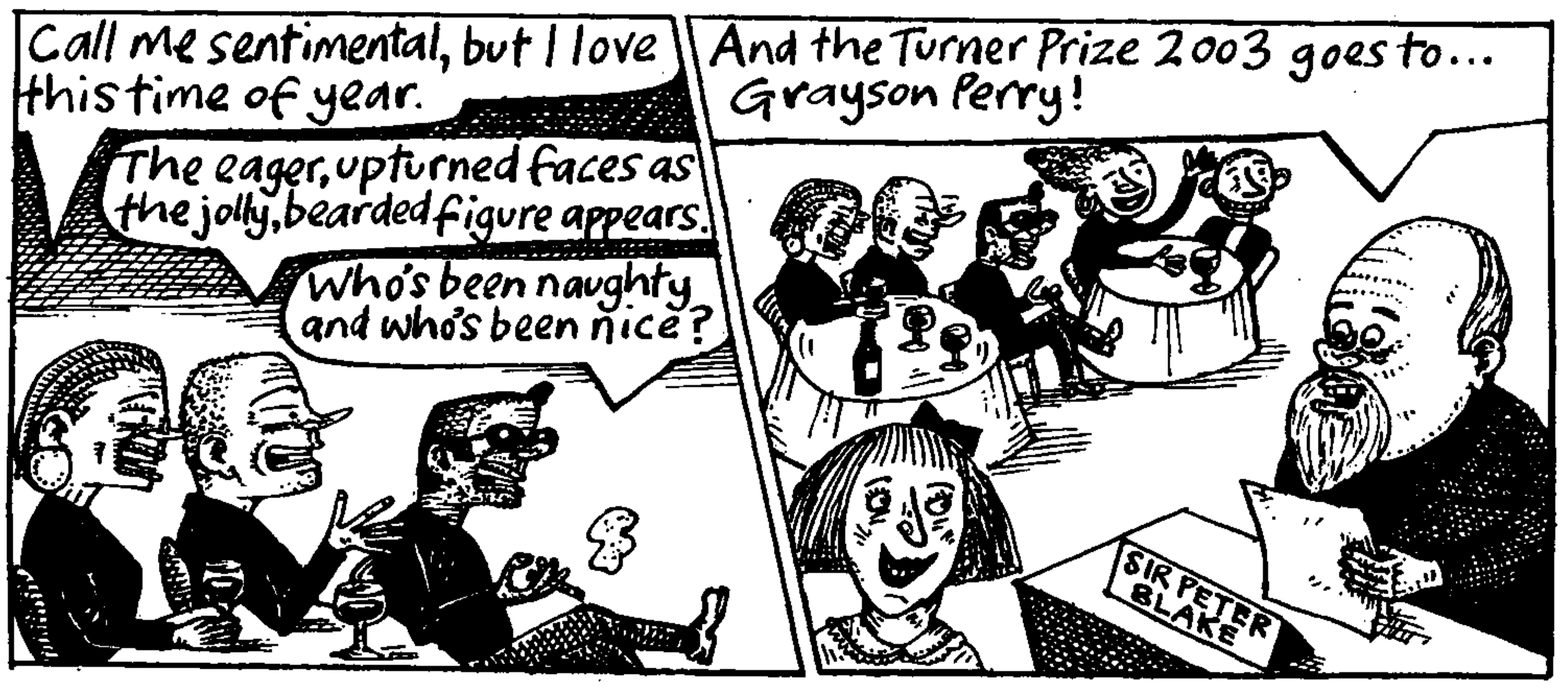
What is really interesting about the current conservation plan is that it reveals that recent interventions at the Ashmolean are now regarded as unsatisfactory. These include the hugely destructive forecourt development of 1994-96 by Messrs Stanton Williams (*Eye* 833) which destroyed Cockerell's arrangement of levels, walls and lawns. Now we learn that the education centre under the forecourt is considered defective, as is the new lecture theatre by the same architects, and both are thought worthy of replacement.

Then there is the "Sunken Court" scheme of 1997 — commissioned by Mr Puce — which is now proposed for demolition. Well, well: if the huge sums spent on spoiling Cockerell's wonderful building in the last decade are seen as wasted, why should we accept that the authorities at the Ashmolean know what they are doing this time?

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Call me sentimental, but I love this time of year.
The eager, upturned faces as the jolly, bearded figure appears.
Who's been naughty and who's been nice?
And the Turner Prize 2003 goes to... Grayson Perry!
SIR PETER BLAKE

I-SPY

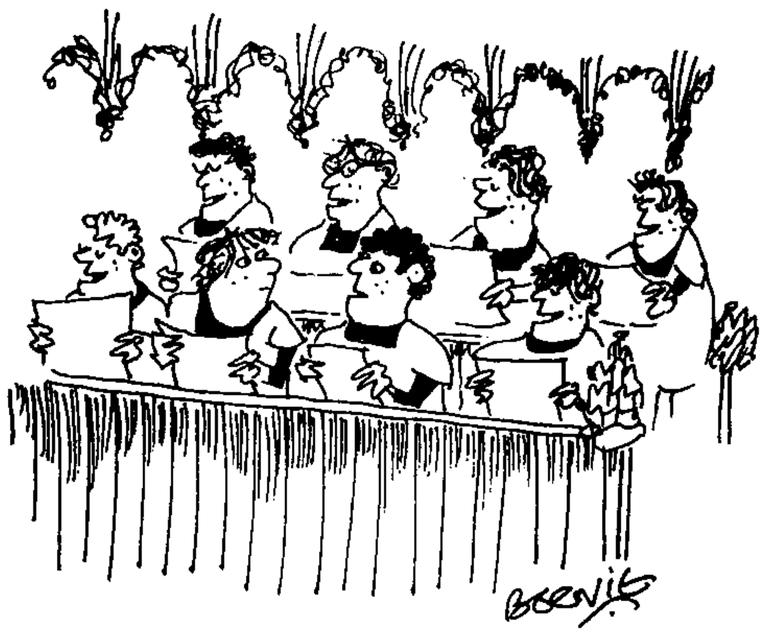
Puerto de la Cruz

Innsbruck, Austria

Odawara, Japan

Croatia

Submitted by Nicholas Burrell, Andrew Shaylor, Jeanette Book & Tony Dunn. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs.)*



"I can't believe it's not Rutter...!"

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WHEN Sir Simon Rattle stopped a Prom in mid-performance this summer to eyeball a member of the audience whose cellphone had made an unscheduled entrance to the *Rite of Spring*, he seems to have set a precedent.

No longer docile in the face of bad behaviour at their concerts, classical musicians have begun to strike back. And they're fighting fire with fire: which is to say, behaviour just as bad.

Some weeks ago the celebrated cellist Steven Isserlis was playing a recital and objected to the fact that someone in the front row fell asleep right under the performer's nose. Refusing to accept the possibility that this was some reflection on his playing, Isserlis became seriously angry.

When at the end he received the customary bunch of flowers, he leant down from the platform to the sleeping man and hit him with them several times about the head. The man was subsequently said to be "surprised" by the severity of the response.

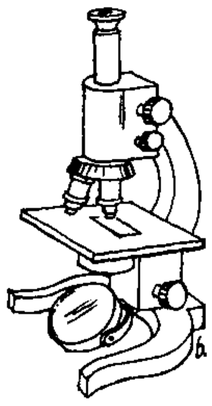
No more surprised, though, than an audience in Rio de Janiero which failed to appreciate a new production of *Tristan and Isolde* by the radical director Gerald Thomas.

Hoping to enliven what is, after all, a long and static opera, Mr Thomas introduced a few things to the staging (masturbation on a sofa, Siegmund Freud on speed, a catwalk fashion-show...) that Wagner never got around to. Unsurprisingly his curtain call was met with boos and whistles.

In these circumstances stage directors smile through the attack as though the boos were cheers. But Mr Thomas isn't that conventional. He turned his bottom to the audience and dropped his trousers. This might not have been *so* bad; but he dropped his pants too and is facing prosecution for indecency.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



THE sponsors are at it again: last week we learned that "water is the way to fight flu".

With the annual influenza panic about to begin, scientific research has apparently discovered that people who drink lots of water every day are less likely to catch a cold than those who don't. Interesting finding, you think, until you read the small print: "The research was commissioned by water-filter manufacturer Brita."

This is the latest in a series of "sponsored findings". A few years ago we learned that chocolate contains chemicals called flavonids which have an antioxidant effect and may prevent heart disease. The research was sponsored by Mars. We've had the tea council supplying journalists with reports on the health-giving aspects of tea. And this summer the General Medical Council's Dr Susan Jebb warned of the dangers of the Atkins diet, neglecting to mention that her research was funded by the Flour Advisory Bureau.

Just because research is sponsored doesn't mean it is flawed. But it makes you wonder. Would Mars commission and publicise a study that found chocolate was bad for us? (In fact it later turned out that the fatty, milky confection Mars sells is not that good for you after all: the milk probably negates the effects of the antioxidants.)

As for drinking water, many nutritionists agree that as water can come from a variety of sources – tea and coffee, fruit juice, soup and so on – drinking water on its own is not necessary (let alone drinking *filtered* water).

WHAT is to blame for home secretary David Blunkett's enthusiasm for "biometric" ID cards? The idea that every citizen can be seamlessly scanned using iris-recognition and/or fingerprint reading is a staple of science fiction.

Biometrics sounds terribly sexy and 21st century: but when is someone going to tell Blunkett that such expensive trickery is a waste of time in the real world? Establishing your *identity* and establishing you are the person your *card says* you are – however accurately you do the latter – are not necessarily the same thing. And no ID scheme, however sophisticated, will stop terrorists coming from other countries. It will also cost billions.

Fundamentally it has not been explained how any national biometric scheme will "bootstrap" itself. If all citizens are required to register for one of the new cards, how are they going to, er, prove their identity? By using existing means of ID of course like passports and birth certificates which are easily forged. The new system will simply end up legitimizing existing fraudulent ID.

'Boffin'

"Bloody top-up fees!"

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

PUPILS and teachers at six Scottish schools have been forced to bid farewell to their essential computers, library books and school desks after they were repossessed by sub-contractors in a collapsed private finance initiative (PFI) scheme.

Firms supplying senior schools in East Lothian have seized and impounded hundreds of items after the main contractor, Ballast UK, went bust.

Six schools have been left high and dry by the collapse. At Musselburgh Grammar, most of the contents of the library have been put into storage. All the six schools have been forced to request special consideration from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) for those youngsters whose exam preparations have been badly affected this term.

"No pupil should be disadvantaged through no fault of their own," said a spokesman for the SQA, comparing the situation to when schools burn down.

In October Ballast UK's Dutch parent company, Ballast Needham, pulled financial support for the ailing firm and the company was put into liquidation. Ballast Needham had reportedly tried for several months to find a buyer for the UK arm, which had suffered significant losses in the first half of the year.

IN NORFOLK, meanwhile, councillors have backed a 25-year, 33-school PFI deal with the disaster-prone Jarvis.

The county council seems to be going into the deal with its eyes wide shut to the myriad catastrophes which have plagued education the firm's PFI deals and public partnerships. Cabinet member for education Alec Byrne said: "We are aware of issues in previous projects and are confident that we have taken them into account."

With Jarvis now firmly selected as preferred bidder, the contract is expected to be signed in March 2004.

PS: A student at the JFS school writes to say that the last *Eye*'s report on the unsafe lighting at the Jarvis-run school in Brent fell short of the mark. In fact, our 11-year-old informant, reveals: "Ceiling lights actually did fall to the floor, as did two main girders and part of the ceiling." Yikes!

EXTRA literacy classes are needed at the department for education and skills (DfES).

In a case study of literacy teaching at Rodbaston College, Staffordshire, the DfES report writers describe how students are asked to "summerize (sic) a piece of writing".

Since Rodbaston was awarded top marks for literacy at its last inspection, maybe the DfES should consider enrolling some of its staff there.

Number crunchings

+ £3m

■ Increase in funding for UN AIDS programmes announced by government for next year

– £100m

■ Decrease in funding for various aid programmes announced by government for next year as a result of Iraq war

Letters

Private Eye

Orienteering

Sir,

*Your correspondent (25 November) exaggerates somewhat. I actually said, and believe, that **some** people who experience their sexual orientation as primarily homosexual can "reorientate" themselves, but that if they wished to explore this they would need to seek the best professional advice, which I assumed was "in the realm of psychotherapy". I am aware of the lively debate, mainly beyond these shores, as to the ease with which a change of orientation might be possible.*

"Knacker swoops on Bishop" got it about right.

Yours faithfully,
Rt Rev PETER FORSTER,
Bishop of Chester.

A daring omission

Sir,

You correctly reported (Eye 1093) that I had said in a speech that final salary pension schemes were dying out in the private sector, shifting workers to more risky and less generous schemes.

You omitted to mention that I made it clear that I consider this a major problem. Instead, you implied that I welcome this development. So just 100 percent the precise opposite of the truth.

Yours sincerely,
ADAIR TURNER,
The Pensions Commission, London EC1.

Not very gay Gordon

Sir,

I bought Eye 1094 to cheer myself up on a train journey. And what do I find in it? A completely humourless obituary for my brother Giles, and a straight diary page from Jake and Dinos Chapman. What's up with you? I thought Private Eye was meant to be satirical.

Yours faithfully,
CHRISTOPHER GORDON,
Winchester, Hants.

Dear Diary

Sir,

We felt compelled to respond to the Craig Brown diary piece "Chapman Brothers". We have to say it's the best interview we've ever not given – it really is very, very funny and frighteningly close...

Best,
JAKE AND DINOS CHAPMAN,
Via email.

"Jake! Dinos! Stop that at once!"

"I'm sure she'd prefer a card dear, especially as she doesn't have a mobile"

Portakabin

Sir,

With the recent publication of details of Her Majesty's cereal storage arrangements, is the Eye aware that Tupperware is in fact a trademark for that specific brand of air-tight plastic food container?

Yours,
SAMUEL WILLIAMS,
Chandler's Ford, Hants.

Doesn't ad up

Sir,

Re: Eye 1094 Ad Nauseam: Barnardo's advertising. There is no question that Barnardo's recent press campaign has created controversy but it's easy to ignore that this has generated a lot of coverage about the problem of child poverty as a result, not only about the advertising itself.

Advertising agencies are employed by their clients for a simple reason, that it takes a creative and sometimes shocking approach to get your message across. Unfortunately, we live in a media environment where simply talking about the terrible conditions in which many children in the UK live, doesn't get noticed.

That you object to the approach taken by BBH on behalf of Barnardo's and that you believe the advertising industry should be subject to more regulation is a matter of opinion. However, it seems that voicing this opinion didn't stop you accepting the money you charged Barnardo's for the two colour pages later in the same issue, featuring the advertising campaign you are so opposed to.

Yours faithfully,
WILL NICHOLLS,
Bartle Bogle Hegarty Ltd.

Sir,

Your article in the Ad Nauseam column on 28 November 2003 says that the NSPCC closed a number of child protection schemes and reduced manpower on its helplines, while financing an expensive advertising campaign. This is simply not true.

The NSPCC's FULL STOP campaign was launched in 1999 with the aim of ending cruelty to children. Inevitably, over time, the focus of some of our services changes to help us achieve this aim, but overall spending on services has increased. In 2002/2003, we spent £68.5m on activities to end cruelty to children – 82 percent more than the amount spent in 1998.

Public education is part of the remit of the NSPCC and has been since its establishment 120 years ago. Advertising is one channel that helps us to move society from simple awareness of child abuse to taking action against it, which is why we work with Saatchi and Saatchi on our campaigns (not M&C Saatchi, as reported in your column).

The results speak for themselves. Most people believe that child abuse is the most important issue for our society to address. Last year our advertisement featuring the physical abuse of a cartoon boy led to a doubling of calls to our child protection helplines. It won a clutch of awards but what mattered to us most was its impact in protecting children from intolerable harm.

JOHN GROUNDS,
Director of Communications, NSPCC.

Sir,

Sorry to spoil a good story at the expense of Lord Saatchi, but you got it wrong (Eye 28 Nov) about The Portman Group handing shedloads of money to M&C Saatchi to campaign against binge drinking. We're a non-profit organisation, and M&C are lending their expertise for free. If they handle the accounts for Beck's, Foster's and Kronenbourg too, then all the more reason for them to strike this deal with us, I'd have thought.

JEAN COUSSINS,
Chief Executive, The Portman Group.

Labouring a point

Sir,

I am dismayed to read Robert Leach's letter (Eye 1094) regarding the labours of Hercules, in which he states not only that he doesn't know of them, but that he doesn't care and can't think of any way in which the knowledge might be useful to him.

Anyone intelligent enough to enjoy Private Eye must realise that one of the purposes of a decent education is to stretch the mind beyond the limits of what is necessary for everyday life. I would bet Mr Leach has encountered the phrase "the twelve labours of Hercules" at some time. Even failing that, he must have seen the phrase "Herculean effort" – did he never wonder what it referred to?

It is likewise not immediately vital to know that Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, that Paris is the capital of France, and that "believe" is spelled with an "ie" but "receive" with an "ei". Mr Leach and I can get through the day without reference to the function of the kidneys, how laws are passed in parliament, or whether Germany won or lost the Second World War. But these are all things we, as normal adults with a place in society, ought to know.

Academically yours,
LYNN ROBERTS,
Bolton, Lancs.

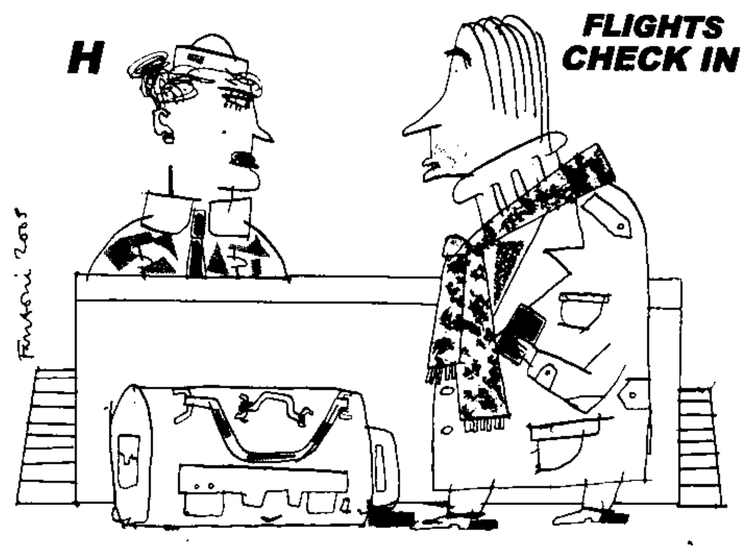
Model correspondent

Sir,

I was rather worried by a factual error in the diary of IDS in the last issue of Private Eye. In the diary, he describes the assembling of a Supermarine Spitfire model, and had a few problems with the fit of the wings, opting in the end to fit both wings to one side of the fuselage. This is, in fact, impossible. The kit IDS was using was the "dogfight duo" kit, which as every good aeroplane modeller knows, is an Airfix kit, available in the 1:72 scale. Airfix 1:72 scale Supermarine Spitfires wing assemblies come as a one-piece wing unit which is then slotted on to the underside of the fuselage. This unfortunate episode has caused one to doubt the authenticity of your diary extracts.

RICHARD HEARING,
Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Now you ask, I let this Iraqi bloke I met in a pub pack my bag"

Lookalike

Ross

Wilde

Sir,

Has anyone else noticed the resemblance between Oscar Wilde and Jonathan Ross?

Yours,
SUZANNE CHAWNER,
Via email.

Choice comments

Sir,

Re: Doing the Rounds. As usual, MD writes incisively on the deficiencies of our health care provision, but on this occasion, Eye 1094, did not quite hit the nail on the head.

Just as the fact that the private provision of health care has always depended upon the inadequacies of public provision – the relationship is much more parasitic than the offering of simple alternatives – so the new industry of analysing and presenting the information required for choice, and the very notion of choice itself, is dependent upon that basic inadequacy of fundamental care.

If every GP, every hospital, every service being offered by the state were of a quality that represented the best currently available, then the need for private care and the need for choice within the public service would disappear. "Choice" per se would become meaningless. This is not utopianism, it is perfectly achievable with the correct political will. That John Reid is attaching so much importance to the Tory-inspired market-place phenomenon of "choice" speaks worlds about the current thinking in this government. Perhaps Private Eye should modify its nickname for John "Oh fuck, not health" Reid. I would suggest, delete "not", and move the comma from after "fuck" to after "Oh".

Yours faithfully,
BRYN GLOVER,
Via email.

Lookalike

Sir,

Nearly three years after the Post Office changed its name and logo, and just eighteen months after it changed it back, the BBC has unveiled the new look for its flagship pop music show, Top Of The Pops.

Yours,
ENA B MACQUEEN,
Via email.

Consignia
top of the pops™

Photo opportunity

Sir,

Further to the recent correspondence on past delegates at Conservative party conferences, from my own objective perspective it does appear that the couple you pictured were, how shall we say, "of a certain vintage".

I wondered therefore whether you might be able to compare and contrast the couple in the picture with ***another*** *regular at Tory party conferences, who appears to have defied the ageing process, possibly through the use of a baseball cap and vest?*

If you could possibly print both pictures alongside each other, I am sure Eye readers could then make up their own minds as to the advisability of following a similar path.

Sincerely,
ANDY COOPER,

Barnstaple, Devon.

From the Gnome Archive

Not right

Sir,

Your cartoon (Jonny Wilkinson on Trafalgar Square plinth) amused me.

Even more amusing was the look on the policeman's face which shows bemusement as to why the architect has built the statue the wrong way round! Yes, the drop goal was with the right foot but, as any fule kno, Jonny always kicks penalties with his left foot.

NIGEL SCOTT (rugby pedant),

Via email.

● Thanks for the dozens of similar letters. Ed.

Victorian values

Sir,

I find it telling that your reporter Piloti chooses to undermine his own argument. In an article criticising a proposed development at South Kensington underground station (Eye 1094) he turns to the Victorian Society to support his case. Would that be the same society that is exposed (p.7) as "campaigning for the needless destruction and alteration of our Victorian and Edwardian built heritage?"

Faithfully yours,
TOM BARTON,

Cardiff.

Number crunch

Sir,

Number of times the same Number Crunching about Richard Caborn appeared in Eye 1094 – 2.

Number of times it amused me – 1.

Regards,
TIM ASTON,

Via email.

Avenue of inquiry

Sir,

R.W. Burdett's series is most amusing, and also historically accurate. In the past street names were less inhibited, and did describe what was available, until they were cleaned up. Medieval London had Slut's Hole, Codpiece Alley (later Coppice Alley), and Gropecuntlane (later Grape Street). In case it is thought the latter was metropolitan sophistication, the same street name is recorded in Wells, Somerset. Paris, naturally, had even more graphic street names, with which I would not wish to sully your hallowed organ even now.

Yours in true and sincere embarrassment at knowing this,
NEIL HOWLETT,

Frome, Somerset.

What a card

Sir,

In Warballs, Eye 1094, I see you smite US patriotism by pointing out that Condoleezza Rice has the honour of "Queen of Spades" in the new "Freedom Cards" decks. May I politely point out that in the game of Hearts, the Queen of Spades is by far the most powerful card.

However, my rebuttal may fall like a deck of cards if one is to recall that said card game is also colloquially known (particularly in the military) as both "Black Bitch" and "Hunt the Cunt".

PAUL MORRIS,

London SE13.

Hart to heart

Sir,

Regarding the vexed question of to whom Professor A.C. Grayling was referring when he wrote in his column of a "notorious Mongol conqueror", Henry Wilton is wrong to argue that this must of necessity denote Genghis Khan, and not Attila the Hun (Letters, Eye 1094).

Although very little is known of the Huns' exact provenance, it could broadly be described as "Mongolian". Their language, or what little of it survives, is clearly of the Ural-Altaic family of central Asia; and the very name "Attila" itself, despite the fanciful conjecture of certain irresponsible philologists that it might represent the nickname bestowed upon the fearsome barbarian warlord by his Visigothic mercenaries, since "Attila" means, approximately, "little father" in Old Germanic, it is, in my opinion, far more likely to be cognate with the modern Kyrgyz word "atam", meaning simply "father", similar to many other formations in the Ural-Altaic family, of which Mongolian is a member.

Yours faithfully,
DR CHRISTOPHER HART,

Via email.

11.40 Hollywood Sex (S,T) Soccer magazine, featuring the latest news from home and abroad, including a review of the week's big games, *Metro*

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"This is like pat-a-cake pat-a-cake butcher's man"
MARK LAWRENSON, BBC
(Bill Moore)

"I enjoyed the football tournament from start to beginning"
RAUL FOX, Sky Sports
(Peter Beynon)

"Me and the children are flying backwards all the time"
VICTORIA BECKHAM, Parkinson BBC1
(Owen Gibbons)

"Initial reports suggest that between one and two people have been killed."
Correspondent, BBC
(Paul Howard)

"Valencia will be hosting the next America's Cup – this is because Switzerland, who won it last time, has no sea round its coastline."
TIM DURRANT, BBC Southern Counties Radio
(Carl Simons)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Delhi**

from our Own Correspondent

THERE are more than 400 million of us living in poverty. But we are not short of money when it comes to defending ourselves.

British Aerospace recently picked up a $1.8bn contract for 66 ageing Hawk trainers, while the defence ministry plans to spend a further $1.2bn on three Israeli airborne warning systems and a Russian Ill-76 plane to carry them.

Further mega-deals are in the pipeline. Russia, our preferred supplier since Soviet days, looks set to cash in. Our navy will buy the Admiral Gorshkov aircraft carrier for $700m and lease two nuclear subs for an estimated $400m. It will also spend $1bn on MiG29 fighters.

Officials say all this hardware will strengthen our nuclear deterrence. But it's hardly likely to be seen that way in Pakistan or China, neighbours with whom we have been locked in border disputes for so long. They were already uneasy over the $6bn spent by the Indian air force over the past five years on new aircraft, helicopters, weapons and radar systems – mostly from Moscow, but also including a $328m contract with the peace-loving French.

Indeed the French aircraft manufacturer Mirage has high hopes of a $4.4bn contract for new fighters. On the water, France is also close to a submarine deal that could be worth $700m. By contrast the US, so much more robust than our gallic friends on the merits of military hardware in international problem-solving in recent times, lags some way behind.

Last year the US's big sale was 12 artillery fire finder radars for just $142m. Nor is it in the running for our army's planned re-equipment programme. South Africa is hoping for a slice of a massive contract for self-propelled howitzers – and so crucial is the deal to the country's ailing defence industry that President Thabo Mbeki travelled to Delhi recently in an attempt to cement it.

The military spending spree has helped fuel the lobbying industry, around which lies the ill-concealed stench of dodgy payments, "commissions" and outright corruption. Scores of senior military officers are reportedly paid retainers by Russian, Israeli, South African and French arms manufacturers. Within weeks of retiring, senior officers, including at least one former service chief, are hired as lobbyists by arms agents. Ministry of defence officials also have their snouts in the trough.

When Tehelka.com, a news website, filmed senior officers and civil servants and Bangaru Laxman, head of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, accepting bribes in 2000 in connection with a fictitious arms deal, a visibly shaken prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said the incident was a "wake-up" call for the country.

But the defence minister George Fernandes was back in government inside a year and MoD officials were exonerated – even though the judicial inquiry and associated courts martial continue to meander with no apparent end in sight. In fact the only real victim has been Tehelka, which closed down after its shareholders and supporters found themselves on the receiving end of none too subtle intimidation and pressure.

All this defence spending and the gravy train it has spawned are taking resources that might better be spent improving living standards. They are also making the neighbourhood considerably less safe. There are already signs that Pakistan is cranking up its own military spending in an arms race that it can even less easily afford.

Last year American and British leaders rushed to the region when it seemed our perpetual game of cross-border brinkmanship was spiralling towards nuclear catastrophe. And while they did indeed steer us back from the brink, it seems they have taken us no further than the doorsteps of the very people – and, in some instances, their own people – who helped us acquire the means to deliver the apocalypse in the first place.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "The workmen aren't expected to make aesthetic judgements, they just follow orders," Laszlo Bartha told a press conference in the Fine Arts University in Budapest. "They'd been instructed by the curator to bring all the exhibits out of a closed storage wing, and hang them in the central hall ready for the new show, so that's what they did. And when they found a mummified corpse dangling from a rope, they just assumed it was part of the exhibition, so they brought it in and strung it up by the neck near the main entrance."

Bartha was speaking on behalf of the Budapest police, after a human body had been prominently exhibited by the university for several days, in the mistaken belief that it was a piece of modern sculpture. "We're still investigating," he continued, "but we believe the corpse is that of a man who committed suicide by hanging himself about five years ago. The building where he killed himself was disused, and it was crammed with all sorts of sculptures, so nobody even noticed the body until the workmen went in. At the moment, we don't know who the man was, but the biggest mystery is why his body had mummified, instead of rotting as you'd expect. The skin has shrivelled and turned to leather, which is why nobody realised it was a corpse, not a sculpture." *(AFP, 17/11//03. Spotter: Vince Melling)*

– ● –

● *"This ruling is completely unworkable," Billy Rogers of the George County Equine Association told reporters in Lucedale, Mississippi, "and it brings the law into contempt. To be honest with you, if I tried to put a diaper on my horse, I'd probably get my brains kicked out. And even if I got the thing on, it would look ridiculous. We don't want to bag our horses, we just want to ride them in the parade."*

But Lucedale Alderwoman Gladys Hobdy defended the city's controversial ruling on compulsory nappies for large animals, which came into effect on November 7th. "It's not just horses that have to be diapered," she explained, "it's all livestock, including cattle, sheep, and mules. One in three residents owns a horse, so we have thousands of animals passing through the streets of our town each week, with all that that entails. And although a horse is always a pretty sight, the mess they leave behind certainly isn't. This is a small price to pay to protect our streets from poop."

However, horse owners are now threatening to boycott the city's annual Christmas parade, which usually draws about 250 riders. "I don't even know how you're supposed to fit a diaper on a horse," said Rogers, "and I wouldn't even try. Maybe I would with a baby monkey, but not on no horse. The don't like their toilet regions tampered with. And I speak from experience." (The Clarion-Ledger [Jackson, Miss.], 24/10/03. Spotter: Peter Krinks)

– ● –

● "My clients accept that the city council has the right to regulate cab colours," attorney Michael Whitcomb told a meeting of the Utilities and Licenses Committee in Milwaukee, "but it has no right to interfere with business names. My clients' cabs have been painted purple, in accordance with the terms of their licence. But if they want to call themselves Yellow Cab of Milwaukee, then nobody should have any right to stop them."

Whitcomb was speaking after the newly-formed Yellow Cab of Milwaukee company was taken to court by an existing rival cab firm, Yellow Cab Co-Op of Milwaukee. "We are the only genuine yellow cab company in Milwaukee," said a spokesman for the older business, "because we are the only people with a licence to paint our cabs yellow. Allowing another business to call itself Yellow Cab when its cars are purple is just going to confuse customers."

Yellow Cab of Milwaukee survived an initial court challenge, when the judge ruled "that 'yellow' is to cabs what 'light' is to beer." But the Utilities and Licenses Committee placed a bar "preventing companies from using substantially similar names," pending a full hearing. *(Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 11/11/03. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*

CHRISTMAS TO BE CANCELLED

by Our Cultural Staff **Polly Tickly-Correct**

THE SECRETARY of State for Culture, Tessa Jowell, announced yesterday that Christmas will no longer be celebrated in Britain in order not to offend anyone from a different faith, culture, ethnic background or sexual orientation.

She said, "The idea of a national public festival based on a minority religion such as Christianity is deeply offensive to the millions of people who I haven't asked about this but who I am sure would really hate the whole Christian mumbo-jumbo as much as I do.

"People should choose which religious festival they want to have at Christmas and there are dozens of much better ones. There's Hanakah, Divali, Ramadan and shopping at Bluewater just to name a few and there's no reason why we should be shoving Christmas down people's throats at this time of year."

Late News

TESSA JOWELL TO CLOSE DOWN ART GALLERIES

"These buildings are full of pictures painted by dead, white males", she told reporters, "and a majority of them feature scenes of a Christian theme which is obviously deeply offensive to the vast minority of people in this country."

Even Later News

TESSA JOWELL TO ABOLISH HERSELF

"I am a disgrace," she said. "I am white, middle-class and deeply offensive to everybody."

THOSE GLAD TIDINGS IN FULL

by Our Bible Staff **Phil Prophecy**

AND LO an angel appeared to the shepherds and said unto them, "Fear not for I bring glad tidings of great joy". He continued, "Peace on Earth and Goodwill to Men. Except in the Middle East. And Northern Ireland. Obviously.

"And Afghanistan, the Congo, Ethiopia and Indonesia. And then there's all the other places. On second thoughts, let's forget it. I'll be off then, I didn't come, OK?"

On Other Pages: King Herod defends Massacre of the Innocents: "I am no David Blunkett", he jokes.

What you won't see NEWSNIGHT

Kirsty Wark *(for it is she)*: As the row grows over the so-called Holyrood scandal, there are questions over the role of Kirsty Wark at the centre of it all. I am joined in the studio by myself. Kirsty, these are serious allegations...

Kirsty: I...

Kirsty: First you sit on the selection panel for choosing the architects for the new parliament building. Then the BBC commissions your private company to make a documentary about it. Then when the whole project turns into a hugely expensive shambles, you won't hand over the tapes to the official enquiry...

Kirsty: Can I just say that...

Kirsty: No, no let me finish. Furthermore when you are questioned by the barrister at the inquiry, you fail to mention that you were a bridesmaid at his wedding. It all smells pretty fishy doesn't it?

Kirsty: Well, let me ask *you* a question, Kirsty. How come *you* are still presenting Newsnight for the BBC when they should be broadcasting an investigation into *you*.

Kirsty: That's all very well, Kirsty, but what I'd like to know is how come the costs of *your* licence-payer funded documentary have gone through the roof? There's hundreds of thousands of pounds adrift here, aren't there?

Kirsty: Are you accusing me of impropriety? That's a bit rich coming from you.

Kirsty: How dare you?

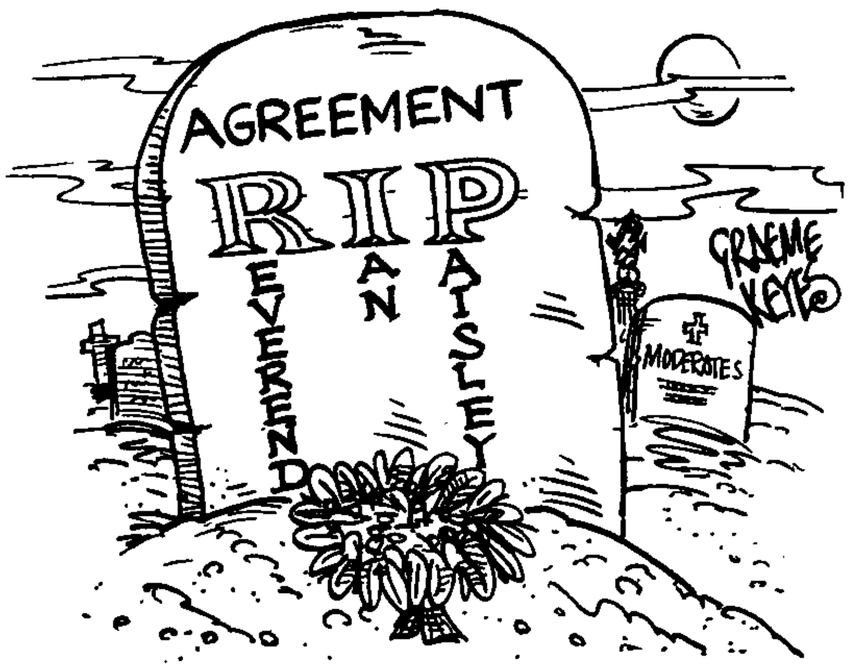
Kirsty: I'm not going to sit here and listen to this.

Kirsty: Me neither.

(Both storm out in huge huff complaining they have been treated as if they were guests on Newsnight).

THE MAKE UP OF THE NEW NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

D.U.P	30 seats
Ulster Unionists	27 seats
Sinn Fein	24 tonnes of semtex, five hundred rocket-powered grenade launchers, seven hundred Kalashnikov sub-machine guns and three thousand petrol bombs *(surely "seats"? Ed).*
S.D.L.P.	18 seats



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And I certainly don't mean "goodbye", whatever certain parishioners might be hoping!

No, as Christmas approaches, this is the time of year when we all look forward, not back! Which is why I am celebrating this Advent-tide by holding what I have called my "Big Conversation".

Those who were in church for Evensong last Sunday will remember that this comes from two Latin words "conus" (which means "to pretend") and "versatio" (which means "to listen!).

So I am asking everyone in the parish to think very hard and to tell me what are their real concerns about the way the parish is going.

And, I promise you, what I want to hear are the views of ordinary people.

I'm not interested in the same old gripes from the grumpy brigade who we hear far too much of – Mr Cook, Mrs Short, Mr Dobson, Mr Kilfoyle, Mr Marshall-Andrews – gosh, I'm getting bored just listing them!

No let's hear it for a change from the guy at the back of the church who wants to say what a great job we are doing in the parish, and how well everything is going!

We don't hear much from him, do we, which is why I want to give the chance to join in the Conversation.

What about the woman who wants to say "thank you" to the Rev Dubya for his inspiring crusade against the evil Satan whereever he may be found (which I'm sure will be soon?)

What about the young student who wants to tell us how willing he is to pay back what he owes the community for his studies (and possibly a little more on top!)

I could talk for hours to him, couldn't you?

And then there's the little old lady who's been waiting for years for a hip operation. She might well want to tell me that she really doesn't mind at all, because she appreciates that there are plenty of more deserving cases who have every right to be treated first, even if they have to go private!

Are you beginning to get the idea? Real people, real conversations, real progress!

And the list goes on. The phone rings and there is a man who's just been burgled. What he wants to tell me is that the police have immediately caught the culprit!

Of course he can't, because they're so busy these days, what with all these speeding offences, that they simply haven't got time to arrest burglars.

But our friend knows that, and he shows a real appreciation for everything the

police are unable to do.

Hey, I'll be honest with you. I've learned a lot talking to these people, or at least I will when I do talk to them. And I think you will too!

Because, as we read somewhere in the scriptures, "yea, verily, for it is better to talk than it is to listen" (Letter of St. Peter to the Mandelsonians, Ch.14).

So between now and Christmas I want all of you to spend a few minutes every day thinking of all those important things which could make similar topics for our "Big Conversation".

And to inspire your letters, faxes, e-mails or texts (gosh, I'm beginning to sound like one of those phone-in programmes, aren't I?), here are the words of a chorus which we are going to try out at this week's evensong.

♫ Join, join, join the Conversation ♫
Everybody in the nation
Black or white or brown or gay
♫ Talking is the only way ♪
Join, join, join the Conversation
Let me hear your information
Old or straight or rich or gay
♫ Talking is the only way ♫♪
Join, join, join the Conversation
Come to me with your frustration
Fat or thin or tall or gay
Talking is the only way
♫ *Words and music T Blair 2003*

Tony

THE VISIT OF MONSIGNOR CHIRAC TO THE PARISH

The photographer asked Jacques to say "Cheese-eating-surrender-monkey"!!!! T.B

A THOUGHT FOR CHRISTMAS

As the season of goodwill is upon us we should perhaps give some thought to the Seven Deadly Sins:- and by far the worst of them, I think we all agree is Envy. I want to tell you a story about a man who desperately wanted his best friend's job.

Let's call him Mr Green and his best friend Mr Wonderful. Now Mr Green lived next door to Mr Wonderful and desperately "coveted" (as they used to call it in the olden days from the Latin covetus meaning greedy, ungrateful, Scottish git) his house and his position.

Mr Wonderful however wisely realised that Mr Green was sick with jealousy and that this all-consuming envy was making Mr Green ill.

So he decided to tell the world that yes, Mr Green did want his job but this desire was "not ignoble".

"It is, however," he said, "an appalling sin for which there will be no forgiveness and Mr Brown should be deeply ashamed of himself." ***T.B***

That St Albion Rugby Team Victory Parade Timetable in Full

11.00am Vicar welcomes St Albion's Rugby Team onto open top bus outside vicarage (Team inside, vicar on top)

11.20am Bus proceeds down St Albion's High Street stopping outside Mr Dirty Desmond's Adult Entertainment Centre for photo opportunity of the Vicar accompanied by readers' wives and Asian babes

11.30am Bus proceeds for short distance before stopping outside Mr Dirty Digger's Slags 'n' Mags Emporium for photo opportunity of the Vicar accompanied by page 3 "Rugger Stunna", Tracy Snodgrass, 17, wearing special "Jonny Wilkinson" thong

11.45am Bus stops outside St Albion's railway station to sign autographs for commuters delayed by victory parade

12.00pm Bus returns to vicarage for victory lunch with selected guests including friends of the vicar and no-one else

12.15pm Drinks and nibbles to be served including Lager and Limelight, Cashin nuts and Bandwagon Wheels. No coffee in case the vicar has a heart attack

12.30pm Vicar leads victory community singing with old favourites including "Glory, Reflected Glory Alleluia" and the legendary "Swing High Sweet Opinion Poll".

12.45pm Rugby team depart leaving Vicar in charge of cup "for safekeeping".

'SPIGGY IS F****** W*****' CLAIMS FELLOW TURD

by Our Pop Music Staff **C.D. Rom** and **D.J. Taylor**

A HUGE storm erupted last night when the 83-year-old lead guitarist of the Turds, a popular singing group formed early in the last century, launched a vicious attack on the group's lead singer, Spiggy Topes, for accepting a knighthood.

Said the old gentleman from his 412-room retirement home in Weybridge, Surrey, "Spiggy is a total b****** to my mind, for grovelling to the Queen, the totem pole of the Establishment, which back in the Sixties tried to have us all put in the Tower just because we smoked a few joints in the privacy of our toilets and that."

Hard Day's Knighthood

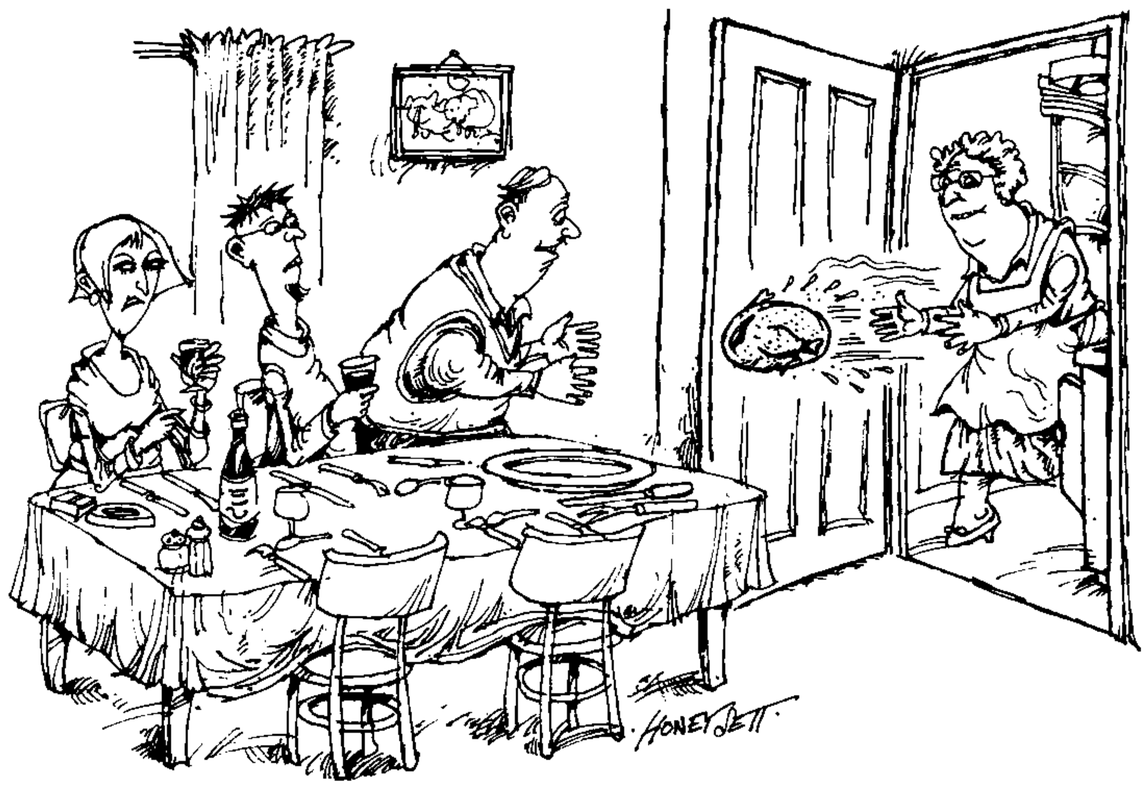
The elderly rock star's ravaged face creased in anger as he snarled, "Spiggy and me go way back, with hits such as *'Love Is The Thing, Hate Isn't'* (of which I incidentally wrote both the music and the words) and to what's left of my mind, it is a total war crime for him to accept a seat in the House of Lords, which totally flies in the face of everything we stood for."

Sri Lanka

"I am writing a protest song entitled *'Spiggy Is A Right C***'* for my new Christmas solo album which I hope to have in the shops by 1999."

Sir Spigismond was unavailable for comment last night as he is watching cricket as a guest of the President of Sri Lanka.

Sir Spigismond is 95.



"It's amazing, my parents had never even seen a rugby match before"

IRAQ TURKEY 'WAS A FAKE'

THE WHITE House has been forced to confirm that the prized turkey pictured with U.S. troops in Iraq over Thanksgiving wasn't a real president.

"While George Bush looked to all intents and purposes like a real president, he is in fact just a dummy wheeled out for photo opportunities by the right-wing hawks who actually run the White House," said Donald... *(cont. p. 94)*

Christmas Truces You Won't See (No. 0001)

NEW WAITING LIST SHOCK

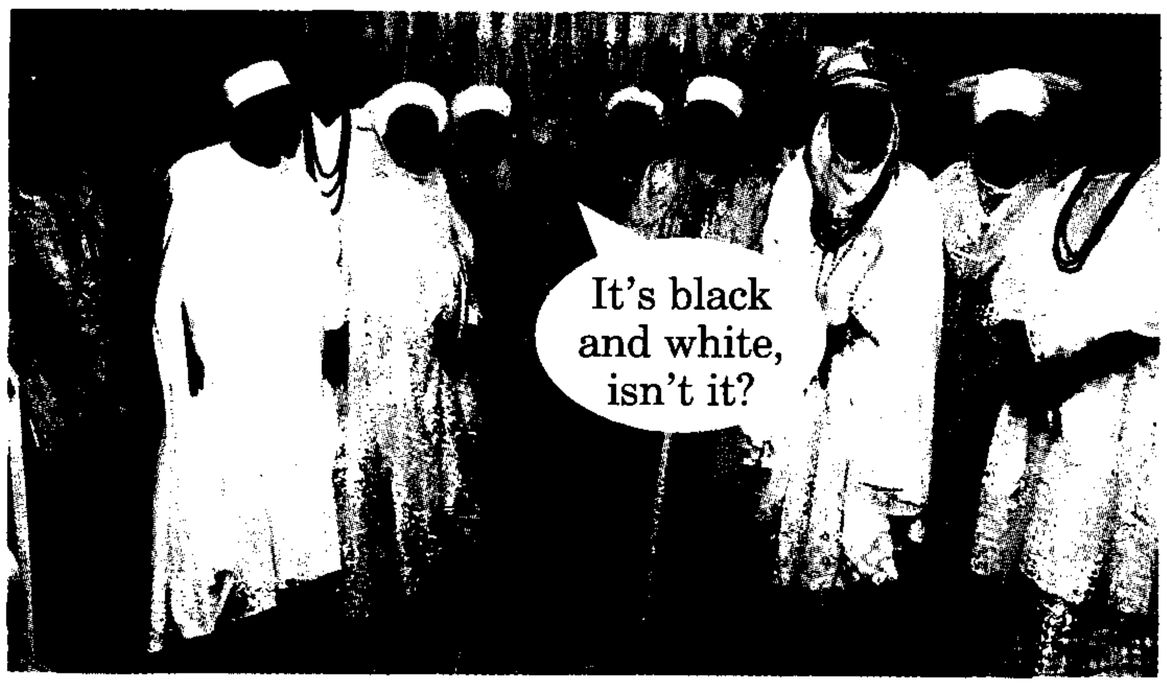
by Our Medical Staff **Sue Perbug**

THE NHS was in crisis again last night when new figures were released showing that in the majority of British hospitals some bacteria had to wait "up to three days" to be admitted.

Said one furious lethal germ, "It's a disgrace. I had to wait for ages. There was literally no place for me to go. All the hospitals were choc-a-bloc with bugs. Finally, someone failed to wash their hands and I got into an old people's ward."

He continued, "I had considered going private but, frankly, bugs like me just can't get into those hospitals at all."

COMMONWEALTH DECIDES ON MUGABE



BLAIR ON SECRET MISSION TO WESTMINSTER

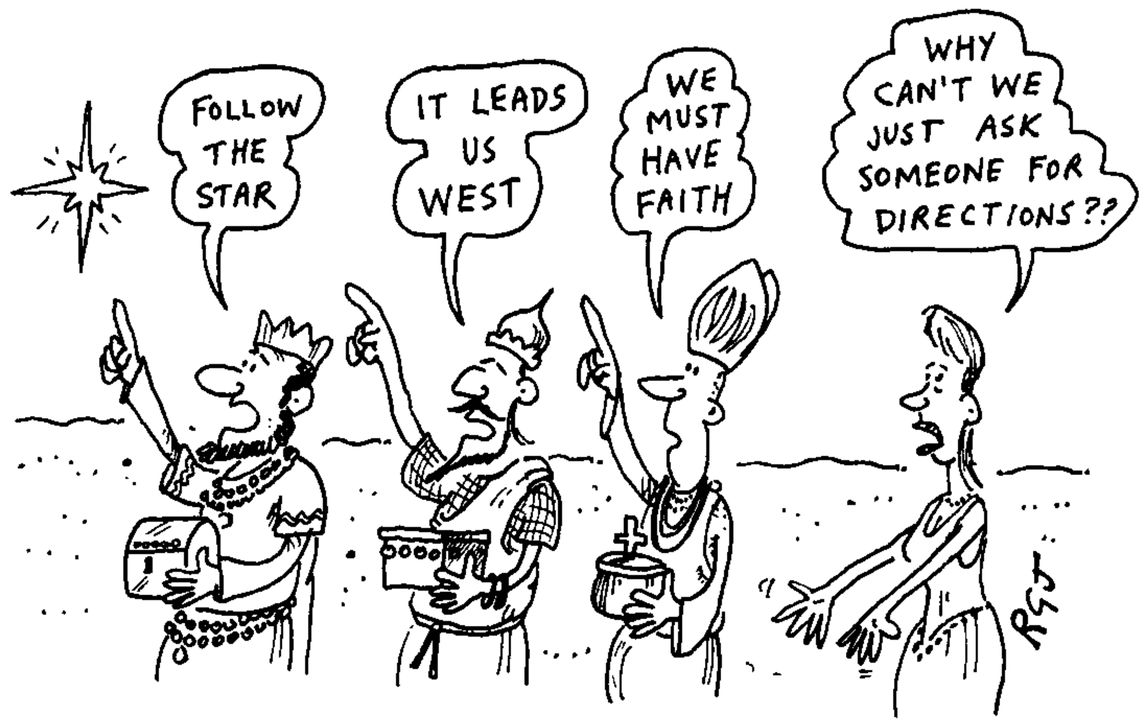
by Our Political Correspondent **George W. Bush**

AMID extraordinary secrecy, Tony Blair today paid an audacious lightning visit to the House of Commons, where he mingled for a couple of hours with Labour MPs.

"Because of our very real fears for the safety of the Prime Minister visiting a place where rebel attacks on his bills have become more audacious and ferocious in recent weeks, only a handful of close aides even knew the trip was taking place," said a senior Number 10 spokesman.

"A clearly emotional Prime Minister had tears running down his cheeks as he told astonished MPs that he didn't charge hundreds of miles through the Home Counties to defeat a ruthless Conservative Government, just to retreat before a bunch of left-wing backbenchers and Tory peers."

However, the publicity coup seemed to backfire as just hours after flying out of the House of Commons, Blair's proposals for introducing University top-up fees were fatally wounded in the lobby and left for dead.



Three wise men and a woman

THIS WEEK

LYNNE TRUSS

May I...

This column should strictly be called 'My Spoon And I'. This is a common error, but it is still an irritating one and I feel that such sloppiness should no longer be tolerated.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

I am not sure that one is connected "with" a spoon. This may be common usage nowadays, but there is a good case for the more traditional "connected to" or even the...

Thank you.

Lynn Truss is the author of the best-selling guide to punctuation and grammar 'Eats Spoons And Leaves'

Late News

CHICKEN LICKEN DEFENDS WARNINGS

DESPITE criticism from all quarters that he was spreading panic unduly, the Home Secretary Chicken Licken, defended his comments that the arrest of a man in Gloucester had foiled an Al Qaeda plot to make the sky fall down.

"I had every right to say exactly what I did, I'm not one for spreading undue panic," insisted Chicken... *(Cont. p. 94)*

PORTILLO DEFENDS MPs' SECOND JOBS

MICHAEL PORTILLO today defended earning up to £50,000 as a backbench MP despite criticism that it meant he couldn't fully concentrate on his media career.

"I can assure the controllers of Channel 4, ITV and the BBC that my media career always comes first," Portillo told reporters at the launch of his new six-part Channel 5 series 'Portillo's Portaloos' where Michael will chart the history of the Portaloo in Britain. "Whatever work I do in the House of Commons is only carried out in my spare time and when filming commitments allow..."

To Let
ROOM
Fully furnished, in house, in quiet colder sack, 15 mins walk from Glos city centre. All mod cons.
Weekend Citizen (Cheltenham)

Exclusive to all newspapers

SOHAM

HUGE REALLY UNPLEASANT HEADLINE – GRUESOME DETAILS BELOW

By Our Court Staff **Pru Rient** and **Sandy Ghoul**

A COURT yesterday heard *more really nauseating* details about a disgusting murder.

No words can possibly do justice to just how revolting yesterday's proceedings were.

Shocking

Which is why we have devoted the whole of our front page, and half of today's paper, to spelling out in detail the full horror of what our entire news team has been able to report from the courtroom.

In addition we are able to cover several pages with pictures so moving that we hope they will help to sell lots of newspapers.

You might think that only the jury would need to know what exactly is happening in this horrifying case, and that the rest of the population could be kept quite adequately informed by means of a short court report on page 8, under the headline "Soham Case – Day 94". But no, we (cont. p 2-24).

Top QC's astonishing cross-examination reveals the horrifying truth

QC: "I put it to you that you are lying, are you not?"

Accused: "Yes, I am".

Full Court Report Inside – plus pics, plus graphics, plus no stories about anything else that's going on in the world at all.

BBC IN COKE CREDIT ROW

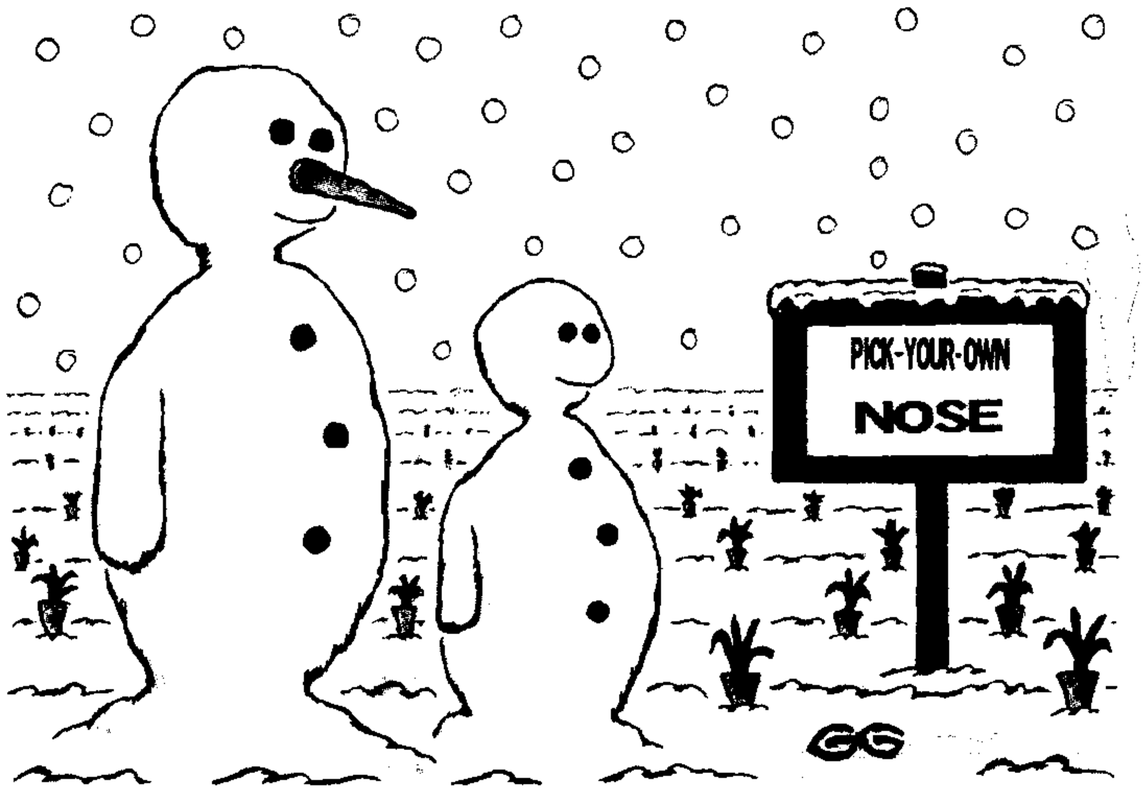
by Our Man At The BBC **Phil Nose**

BBC1 was plunged into controversy last night by its decision to give a credit to coke on its chart show.

Said a spokesman, "We all know that cocaine is behind most of the acts on the show and it is only appropriate that the BBC acknowledge this. I can't see what the fuss is about."

White Powder City

He continued, "coke is only mentioned once or twice on the show and gets a small name check in the closing credits. This sort of fuss over nothing is quite depressing – excuse me I must just go to the toilet. I'll be back feeling much better in a minute."



Now accepting orders for over-ready Free Range Turkeys and Farm-reared Geese
at
Herterich Pork Butchers
Westport and Castlbar
Mayonews

A Doctor Writes

AS A DOCTOR I am often asked "Doctor, can you come out quickly, I think my husband has just had a heart attack".

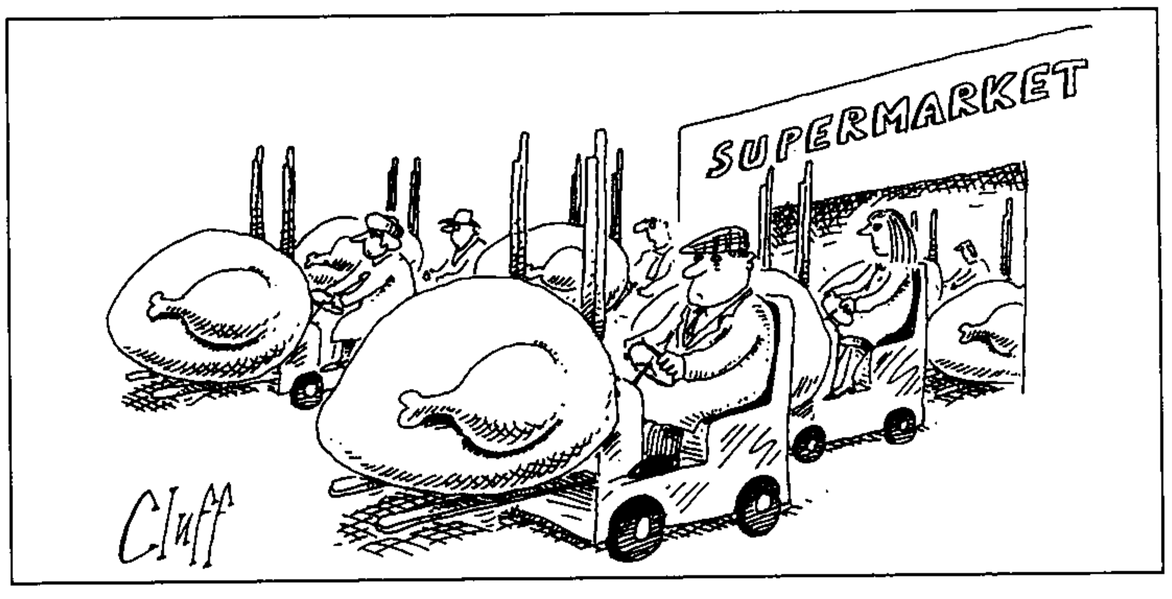
The simple answer is "No – it's 10 o' clock at night, it's not in my contract and, anyway, I'm going to bed shortly."

The caller very often then exhibits alarming symptoms of distress, and it is advisable to put the 'phone down and switch it over to the answerphone.

If you are worried about the health of a loved one in the middle of the night – what we doctors call *Moriturus nocturnus* (or *imminent death syndrome*) – you are advised to wait until the morning and then make an appointment in the usual way.

In extreme emergencies you can consult www.whathaveigot.com on the internet, or purchase a copy of Dr Stuttaford's 'Your Best Loved Diseases', available from all good bookstores.

© A Doctor 2003



NEW OUTSOURCING SHOCK

by Our Economic Staff
Cal Centre

THERE was anger last night following the announcement that Britain was to be closed down and moved to India.

Said a spokesman for Britain, "In today's global environment we simply cannot afford to stay in this country. By relocating Britain to India (just outside Bangalore) we will be able to provide the same services at a fraction of the cost."

Norwich Union Jack

But British citizens were angry at the move which could cost 30 million jobs. Said one, "I tried to complain about this but I was put through to a call centre in Madras."

GNOME'S XM

Concorde Lovers!!!

Now you can remember the greatest triumph in aviation history every time you write, with

'BIRO-CONC'

The world's first model supersonic airliner/ballpoint pen combination.

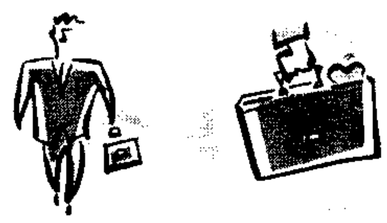
Colours: Simply Red, Deep Purple, Floyd Pink

Only 99p

TOAST LOVERS!

Say goodbye to no-toast misery with

PORT-O-TOAST



LOOKS just like an executive briefcase. But it is in fact the world's first portable toaster. Simply pop in sliced bread and – hey presto! – toast's made.

Ideal for ● train stations ● airport termini ● internet cafes (Batteries and Bread extra)

Jonny Wilkinson says *"I never go anywhere without my Port-O-Toast"*

NEW FROM JAPAN

THE WORLD OF FISH

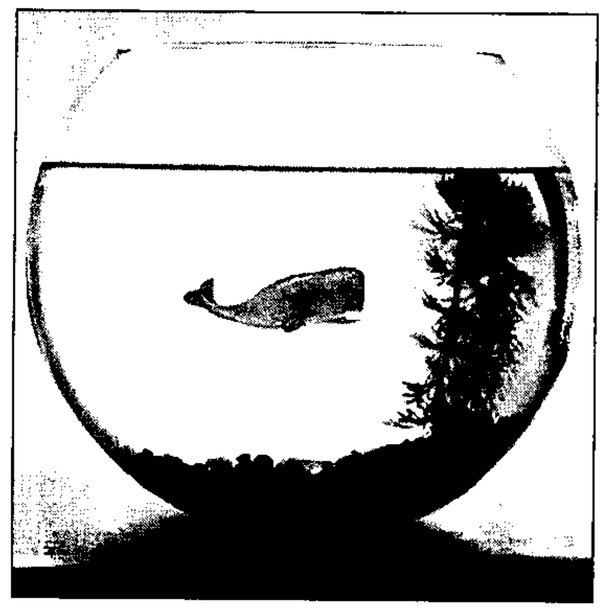
THE WORLD'S SMALLEST WHALE!!!

*THANKS to the wonders of genetic engineering, the scientists of the Kyoto Fish Institute have now produced a fully-grown whale only **nine millimetres** long!!!*

This "mini-leviathan of the deep" will live happily in your fishtank for hundreds of years.

Whale sings theme tune from 'Finding Nemo'

*Only **£4,100,000** (plus VAT)*



From Gnome Safety Services

● FACT: More people are killed and injured in ladder accidents than in any other domestic circumstance.

But not any more, thanks to

The Ladd-Air-Bag™

This revolution in ladder safety technology from Chile guarantees full air-to-ground security at all times.

Once the ladder registers that there is no weight on the rungs, hey presto!, airbag automatically activates!

Price: £27,374

Says JONNY WILKINSON, *"I would never go up a ladder without it."*

Mobile Phone Fans

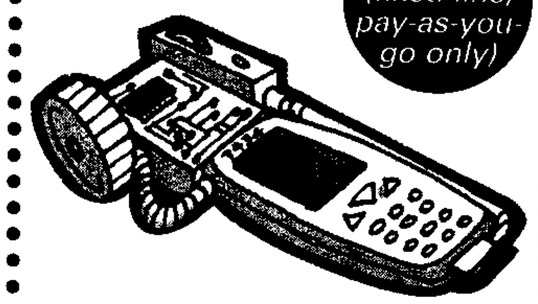
Still can't make sense of text messages? Well, you can now with the

GNOKIA 7374

DETEXTER

THE very latest in mobile phone technology means that every text you receive instantly appears on your screen as *correct* English. Example "CUL8R" turns into "I expect to be seeing you a little later, so I'll say goodbye for now." No text is too difficult for this wonder phone from Bangalore.

£7,322.17 *(fixed line, pay-as-you-go only)*



Conversation Lovers

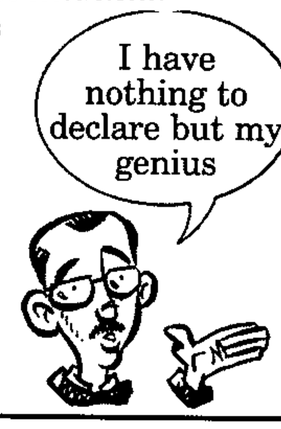
Say goodbye to stuck-for-a-funny-riposte-misery with the incredible

AURA-QUIP™

LOOKS like a conventional hearing aid, but is actually a miniature receiver connected to a database of over one million humorous remarks. The Aura-Quip detects the subject of your conversation, relays it to the database and, hey presto!, sends back the perfect witticism!

★ Your friends will be amazed, thinking that you are Oscar Wilde or even Stephen Fry!

£2,375.75 *(plus modem and line rental)*



Amaze your friends by wearing the

BORIS JOHNSON WIG!!

JUST put it on and everyone will think that you are the world's whackiest magazine editor and MP for Henley-on-Thames!!

Colours: Tory Blue, Conrad Black, Petronella White

Price: £0.48

The Tap Dancing Tarantula From Tonga

FOR centuries, the Tongan townsfolk have been entertained in the long rainy season by the tap dancing exploits of their indigenous arachnid. Now you too can amuse yourself and your family with this Fred Astaire of the Tropical Rain Forest *(Tarantella Tonganensis).*

Simply put on your favourite dance track and watch him go!

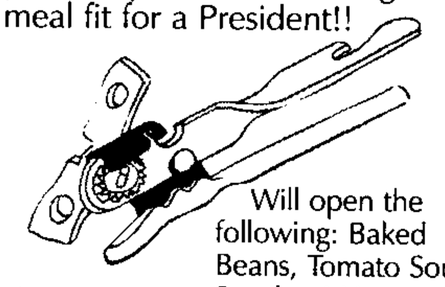
Will dance to .·. Putting on the Ritz .·. Theme from Shaft. .·. Music from Harry Potter

Price: £89.99 per spider
(music not included)

WARNING: The Tongan Spider is classified as highly poisonous and may not be allowed through Customs.

The NIGELLA LAWSON Tin Opener

THE ultimate in revolutionary kitchenware from the Domestic Goddess herself! The must-have accessory for the modern hostess, this incredible device will open **any** can and turn an ordinary tin from your cupboard into a gourmet meal fit for a President!!



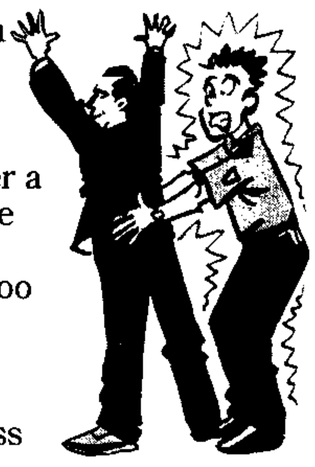
£799.34

Will open the following: Baked Beans, Tomato Soup, Spaghetti Hoops, Ambrosia Cream Rice.

AIRPORT GOERS! *Get your own back on those intrusive security personnel with*

FRISK-O-SHOCK!!

★ LOOKS just like an ordinary belt, but Frisk-O-Shock is wired up to administer a 5000-volt charge to any "frisker" who becomes too personal when checking you for drugs, weapons of mass destruction etc.



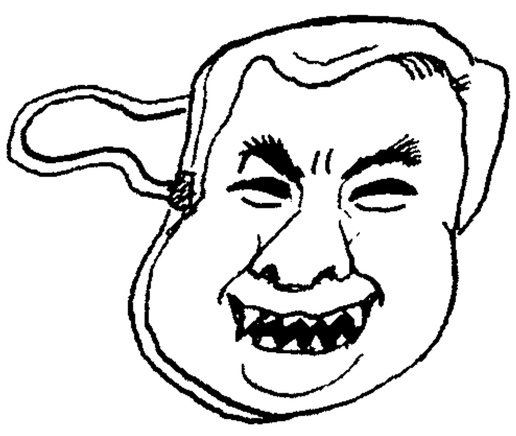
£5,812.99 (plus VAT)

Plays theme tune from C4's 'How Clean Is Your House?'

SMAILMART

Terrify Your Friends This Christmas with a

LORD BLACK OF CROSSHARBOUR HORROR MASK



Your loved ones will gasp in shock when they think that the notorious press baron has come around to take your money!! Watch them shriek with boredom as you deliver a five-hour lecture on Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Fun for all the family!!

Also for Ladies – the Lady Black Companion Mask.

Price: 2p

Amazing Souvenir from Middle Earth

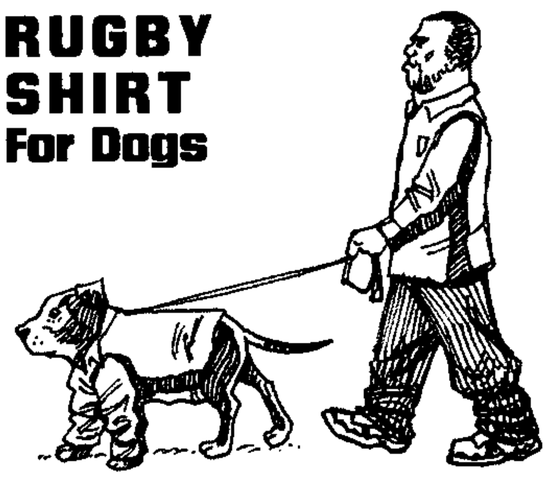
THE LORD OF THE RINGS TROUSER PRESS

Had Gandalf worn trousers, there is no doubt that he would have looked the smartest wizard in Mordor with this miracle of Malaysian no-crease technology. Now you too can be the Lord of the Wrinkles!!

Price: £473.50

A Must For All Pet Lovers!!!

The *'Jonny Wilkinson'* RUGBY SHIRT For Dogs



WHEN the whole nation is still celebrating the historic drop goal which won the World Cup for England, why should Fido miss out on the fun?

Price £79.99 (fits all breeds)

"Swing low, sweet Fido!"

Now at last!!

THE HOME BIG BROTHER KIT

Why watch other people being stars on reality TV shows, where you can star in your own?

What you will see:

- **mealtime argument with partner**
- **drunk friend throws up on carpet**
- **yourself on toilet**

PLUS thousands of other entertaining real-life 'action moments' 24 hours a day.

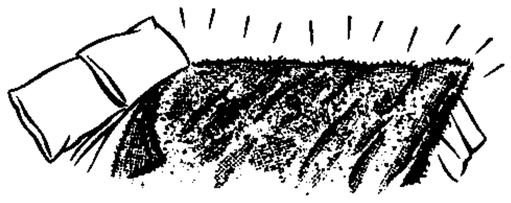
Kit includes: one video, one stand, one lead.

Price: £799.99 (plus VAT)

Gnomes Past

Sleep the sleep of your ancestors with the incredible

CELTIC DUVET COVER



MADE from genuine peat and modelled on the famous 'Cloth of Kells', as slept in by legendary 6th-Century Irish Chieftain Brian Boru (4824mm x 2710 millilitres).

- **Fully compliant with EC safety directives**

Price £482.60

Colours: Emerald, Green, not Paisley.

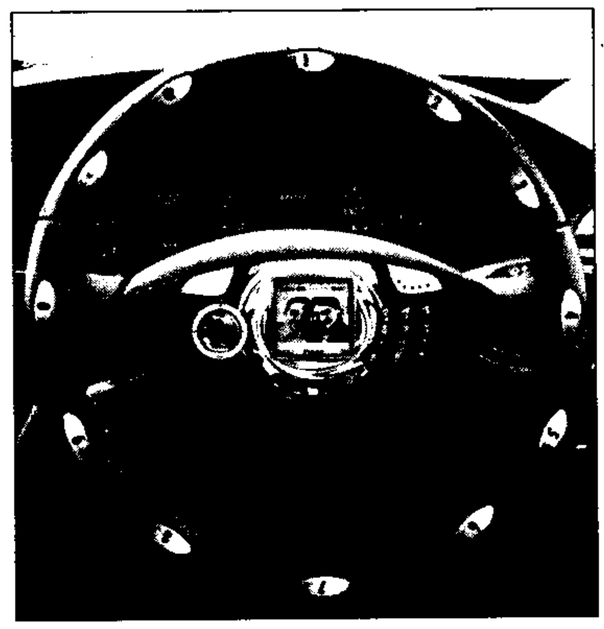
Say goodbye to 'mobile fine' misery!!!!

with STEER-O-PHONE

JUST replace your steering wheel with this new all-in-one, hands-on "mobile communications centre" and you can text, dial, send digital images, connect to the internet and watch DVDs, all without taking your hands off the wheel – *AND MR PLOD CAN'T TOUCH YOU!!*

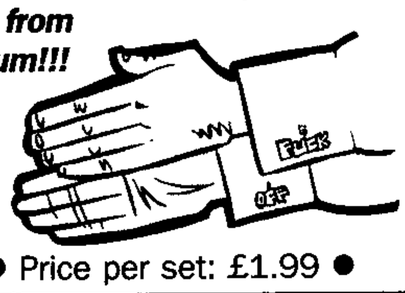
Price: £2,999.99

Imported from Myanmar (formerly Rhodesia) by Auto-Mobile (UK) Plc



LADS AND LADETTES!!!

Amuse your friends with the latest hilarious novelty cufflink craze from Belgium!!!



● Price per set: £1.99 ●

Make money the easy way with

The Gnome Do-It-Yourself Turner Prize Manual

● Damien Hirst ● Tracey Emin ● the Chapman Brothers and now YOU!! With this simple step-by-step guide you can assemble your own Turner Prize entry in a couple of minutes – and become a millionaire! Thousands of ideas to choose from, fully illustrated with a foreword by Sir Nicholas Serota.

- ***100% success guaranteed!***

Price: £9.99

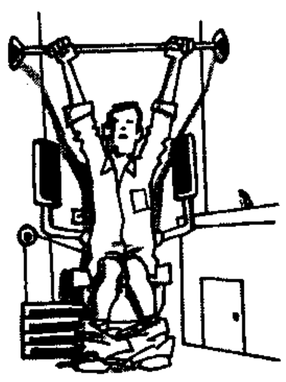
Plays theme tune from TV's 'Rolf on Art'

From Gnome Health

Worried About DVT?
Not when you fly with

The Gnome Mile-High Gym System™

This incredible self-assembly gymnasium fits snugly inside any aeroplane toilet. And within minutes you can be doing a full exercise regime whilst other passengers are risking their lives watching 'My Big Fat Greek Wedding' on the in-flight movie system!



Says **Jonny Wilkinson,**

"I never go anywhere without my Gnome Mile-High Gym System."

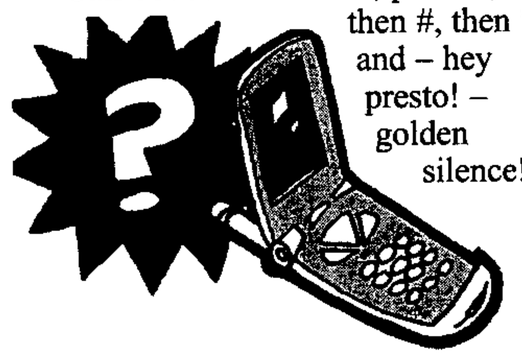
Price £3,999.99 (plus p&p)

NOW AT LAST...

SILENT RING TONES

SIMPLY download one of our range of no-noise ring tones and you need never annoy your fellow travellers again! Angry can't-you-shut-that-bloody-phone-up looks will be a thing of the past!

Call 08708794362874, press 2, then #, then * and – hey presto! – golden silence!



(Calls cost £35 per minute)

COMPUTER BLAMED FOR TORY FAILURE

by Our Computer Staff **Anne Applemac**

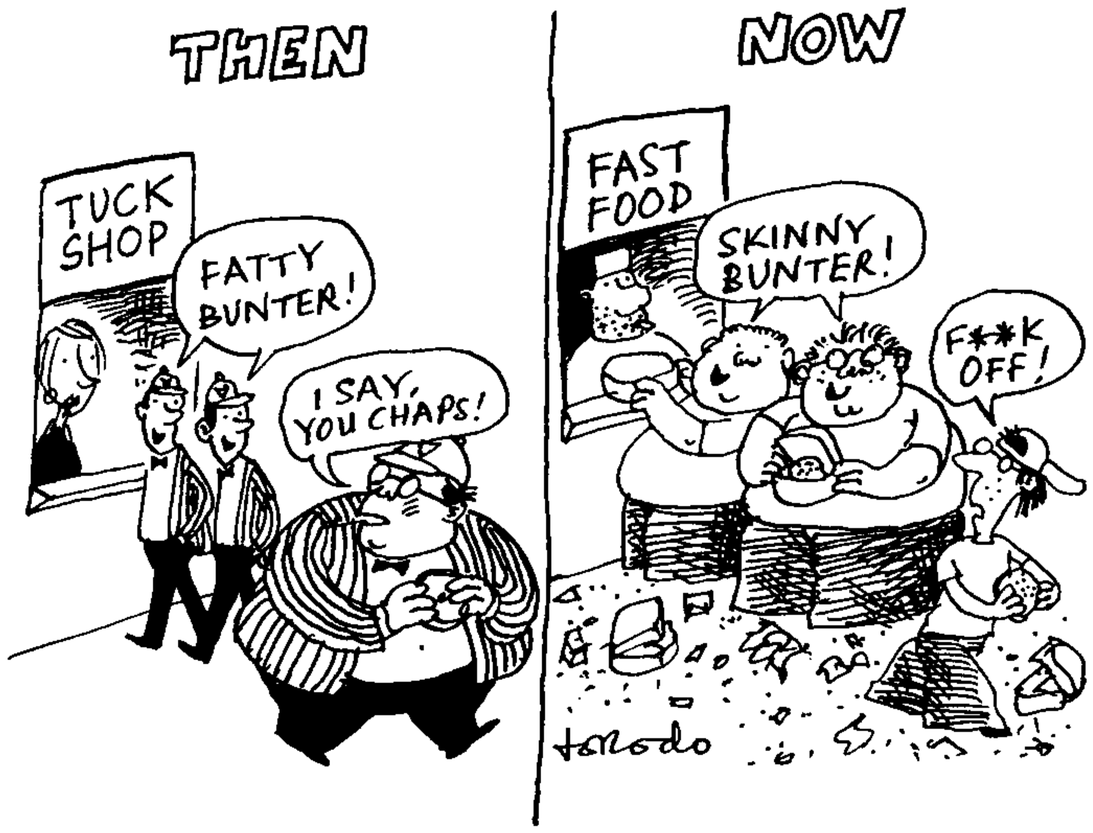
A NEW computer system, IDS, was today blamed for the near meltdown of the entire Conservative Party.

Installed two years ago, at a cost of £100 million, IDS was billed to be the state-of-the-art solution to all the Tories' problems.

But MPs were told today that, from day one, the IDS system "never worked". Despite the best efforts of all the consultants called in to advise on the "100 percent malfunction" of the new computer, the IDS crashed every time it was asked to perform.

Finally, in desperation, the Tories decided to junk the IDS, and replaced it with an old system bought off the shelf, relying on 1980s technology, known as the Dracula (or 'Apple Drac' for short).

Within seconds of being installed, the new system was performing so brilliantly that observers confidently predicted it would soon be running the whole country. *(Reuters)*



— POETRY CORNER —

Lines Written On The Decision By Miss Yasmin Alibhai-Brown To Return Her MBE To Her Majesty The Queen In Support Of The Similar Decision By The Universally-Acclaimed Ethnic Poet Mr Benjamin Zephaniah In Protest At The Shameful Record of British Imperialism Through The Past Twenty-Five Centuries

BY WILLIAM REES-MCGONAGALL

'Twas in the year two-thousand-and-three

(Owing to the length of the title of this poem, the rest of the poem has had to be held over to a future issue)

TURNER PRIZE OUTRAGE

by our Art Staff
Richard Dormant

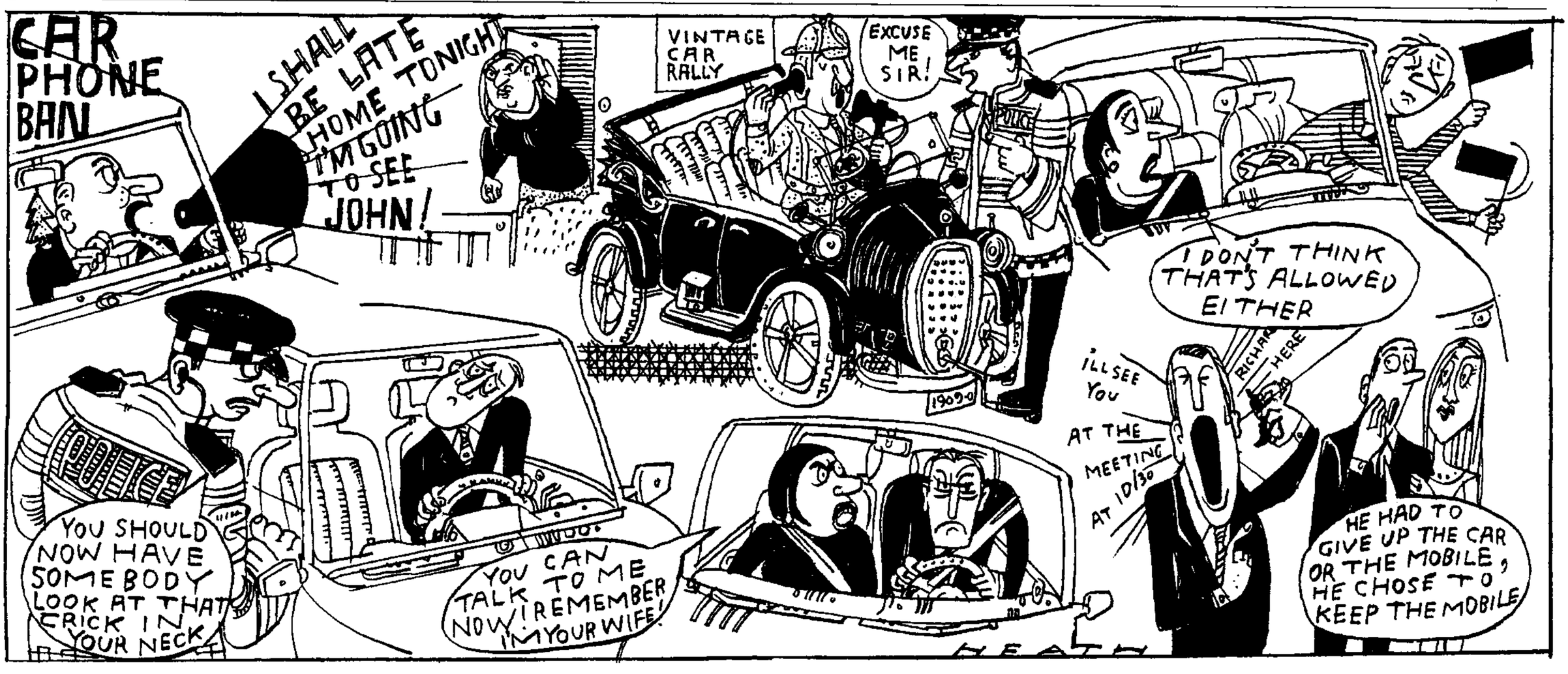
THE ART world was rocked to its foundations yesterday when the prestigious Turner Prize was awarded to a man who dresses up as an artist.

Grayson Perry, 42, is a well known transvestite but in his spare time he likes to pretend to be an artist and win valuable prizes.

Piss pottery

Mr Perry was a surprise winner and said it was an honour to win the award when "there were so many people even less talented than me on the shortlist".

When asked whether the prize money will change his life, Mr Perry told reporters, "No, I will carry on posing as an artist just as before."


CAR PHONE BAN
I SHALL BE LATE HOME TONIGHT I'M GOING TO SEE JOHN!
VINTAGE CAR RALLY
EXCUSE ME SIR!
POLICE
I DON'T THINK THAT'S ALLOWED EITHER
1909-0
YOU SHOULD NOW HAVE SOMEBODY LOOK AT THAT CRICK IN YOUR NECK
YOU CAN TALK TO ME NOW! I REMEMBER I'M YOUR WIFE!
ILL SEE YOU AT THE MEETING AT 10/30
RICHARD HERE
HE HAD TO GIVE UP THE CAR OR THE MOBILE, HE CHOSE TO KEEP THE MOBILE
HEATH

DIARY

Moron: Right now, on this Planet Earth, we are living through nothing less than an explosive tidal wave that's lit a forest fire we simply put into reverse. It amounts to nothing less than a revolutionary hurricane of volcanic proportions. And it's an epidemic that goes by the name of Celebrity.

Beardie Professor 1: In a very real sense, post 9/11, it indicates a seismic shift in the very nature of our culture. As Andy Warhol once said, in fifteen minutes everyone will be famous.

Moron: Everyone now believes they too can be famous for fifteen minutes by appearing on TV. These are sad and deeply troubled individuals *with no visible* talent. Yet they want to appear on television. Tonight I, Piers Morgan, am appearing on TV to ask them the question – WHY?

Jeremy Clarkson: There's a new breed of celebrity who are designed to be famous for fifteen minutes. All they have is a limitless belief in their own importance. And frankly I – Jeremy Clarkson – feel sorry for them.

Moron: Didn't Andy Warhol say something about being famous for fifteen minutes?

Jeremy Clarkson: Too right he did. He said we'd be famous for fifteen minutes.

Moron: As Andy Warhol once said! But is our obsession with transient celebrity eroding our interest in people with real talent? That's what really concerns me. To find out more about this terrifying new phenomenon, I went to a girl with big tits. Tell me, have you got big tits?

Girl with Big Tits: Yeah. I got big tits. As Andy Warhol once said –

Moron: I'll tell you what deeply worries me. It's that I'm only talking to you on television because you've got big tits. That tells us something literally terrifying about the whole nature of modern celebrity. Tell you what – can we get a close-up on those tits? Great! Fantastic! And if you lean back a bit, they'll look even bigger. Lovely.

Beardie Professor 2: Post 9/11, society's obsession with big tits is indicative of what I believe to be the seismic shift that's occured in the very nature of our culture.

Moron: The history of celebrity kicks off in 330 BC. Until then, no-one knew who anyone was at all. The world's first fame-seeker was Alexander the Great – and he hit the world of celebrity big-time. Next to be a world-famous

PIERS MORGAN INVESTIGATES FAME

megastar was Julius Caesar, later played by Richard Burton, husband to Michael Jackson's close friend, Liz Taylor. As the centuries rolled on, more and more people became celebrities – from leading thinker Plato, to ageing lothario William Shakespeare, from busty babe Nell Gwynn to pocket-size royal Queen Victoria, from mega-boffin Isaac Newton to mega wife-killer Dr Crippen. And so we come to Alicia Douvall, who has bigger tits than the lot of them. So, Alicia, isn't it a bit sad that, post 9/11, we're interviewing you, just because you've got big tits?

Alicia Douvall: I think it was Andy Warhol who said –

Moron: Sorry, love, you couldn't shove them forward a bit, could you? Great!

Beardie Professor 3: A historic rupture occured causing a seismic shift that signalled a historic decline of confidence in the whole nature of what Andy Warhol historically called –

Alicia Douvall: How's about if I stick my arse out too? Can you fit it all in, can you?

Moron: After Alexander the Great and William Shakespeare came the 1980s, which turned out to be a historic decade. Though I didn't know it at the time, I personally was living through the Eighties. And by the end of that historic decade a completely different type of celebrity had emerged: the famous celebrity.

Paul Morley: The Eighties came immediately after the post-war period but before 9/11, so they occupy a mythic moment in modern thingy, a transforming moment when something truly mythical takes sort of place in a way that can only be described as a transformation into something truly mythic. Or something.

Moron: In 1994 there came a decisive moment in world history, a moment through which I was privileged personally to have lived. Yes, I was here, standing in this exact spot when Liz Hurley first wore That Dress. Overnight, Liz Hurley re-wrote the tidal wave of celebrity using only a safety-pin. And the world would never be the same again. Sadly, Liz was unavailable for interview. But Jordan's tits are much bigger, so what the heck.

Jordan: I'm more than just a pair of boobs, y'know.

Moron: Can we have a close-up on them, guys?

Beardie Professor 4: What we now know as the Hurley phenomenon caused a seismic shift in cultural attitudes towards the very nature of fame itself, as Andy Warhol had so presciently –

Jordan: I had that Mick Hucknall once, you know. Well, he SAID he was Mick Hucknall, bastard. Men! Still, that's life, innit?

Baldie Psychologist: By conforming to society's need to have intercourse with Mick Hucknall, today's celebrities are, in a very real way, seeking to redress an imbalance between their recognitive needs and their associative impulses, resulting in what is technically known as a "seismic shift", leading to a low self-image or, in some cases, accidental death.

Moron: This is a development which, from my point of view as the editor of a serious newspaper, is deeply worrying, as I intend to show with this groundbreaking experiment –

Jordan: It's extra wiv me T-shirt off.

Moron: Post the historic rupture of the Spice Girls and 9/11, an ocean of celebrity wannabes is surging towards us heaping a forest fire of broken dreams on a burst dam of expectations. Should we, as a society, be worried about what Andy Warhol once called our 15 minute fame culture? What is happening to our young? To find out more, we gave 100 sad young folk the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to look completely desperate on national TV. Next week, I'll be smirking at them behind their backs –and asking top psychologists just what it's like, historically, to have tits as big as Jordan's.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

HELLO MR BLOKE. I'VE JUST COME ROUND TO INTRODUCE MYSELF AS YOUR LOCAL COUNCILLOR.
OH RIGHT.
IF THERE'S ANY ISSUE YOU WANT TO RAISE OR CONCERN YOU WANT TO DISCUSS, THAT'S WHAT I'M HERE FOR.
OH. RIGHT.
SO: ANY PROBLEMS I CAN HELP WITH?
NOT REALLY NO...
KIND OF YOU TO OFFER BUT I'VE GOT MY OWN TEAM OF COUNSELLORS ALREADY...

Literary Review

The Big Yawn

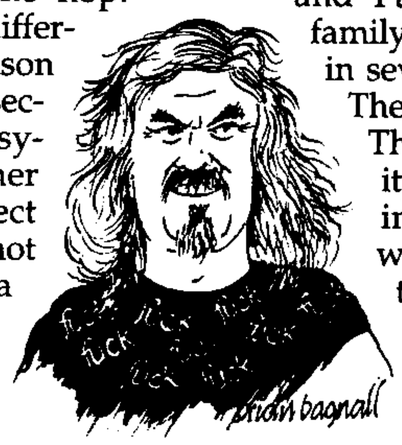
Bravemouth — Living with Billy Connolly

Pamela Stephenson

(Headline, £18.99)

TWO years ago Pamela Stephenson published a biography of her husband, the comedian Billy Connolly. It told how a Clydeside laddie who was abused by his father went from being a welder to a bearded colossus – "a man blessed with comedic panache, musical giftedness and acting brilliance who remains a warm, loving and delightful human being," according to his good lady wife.

Billy was not the first rags to riches story to hit paydirt. In an era of Dave Pelzer and Frank McCourt, everyone knows a battered child shifts units. But given that Billy Connolly is hardly David Beckham, its success caught the publishing world on the hop. Two things made *Billy* different. Firstly, that Stephenson is Connolly's wife; and secondly that she is a psychotherapist. Together these created the perfect biographical package – not just intimate access to a celebrity subject, but celebrity leant a sheen of intellectual gravitas by dint of being given the once over by a shrink. We laughed, we cried – hell, we might have even learnt something.


FUCK
FUCK
FUCK

Big Schott

Schott's Food And Drink Miscellany

Ben Schott

(Bloomsbury, £9.99)

LUCKY, lucky Ben Schott. For some authors it just happens. Nobody knows how or why – obviously, because otherwise it would happen more often. Countless books of trivia have been published over the years, but it was the *Original Miscellany*, with its rinky-dink typography and Stephen Fry cover quote, that became last year's bourgeois stocking-filler.

If you wanted it for Christmas, you didn't get it. If you didn't want it, you got five copies. Barely a year later, young Ben can boast half a million sales and counting, a well-paid sinecure at the thrusting new *Telegraph* and a posse of drooling lackeys at Bloomsbury keen to plan the franchise to 2006 and beyond. And all this for putting daft lists of silly things in no particular order. It's quite an achievement.

For if you look at all closely at the *Miscellany*, there's not actually that much to see. A good half of the facts could be looked up in the *Guinness Book Of Answers*. Others are pure whimsy. If Schott is ever credited with literary innovation – and given the amount of money he has made, it doesn't seem very likely – it would surely be for his playful use of the word "some". "Some Football Clubs", "Some Prime Numbers"... this is dilettantism so shameless it's almost camp.

The charm of the book lies in the way it has been put together, as though by some gentleman amateur tossing in trivial sweetmeats at random. The actual contents are a little bit dull. Not that this matters when you're selling the book to first-time buyers desperate to find Christmas presents for awkward aunts. But it may hinder your efforts a year later when you are trying to shift volume two.

For this year the market is rather more crowded. Transword's lead title for the season is Mitchell Symons's *That Book*, which at least looks different and reflects the veteran trivia prospector's more straightforwardly demotic tastes (if you want a list of celebrities whose mothers were lesbians and fathers were taxidermists, Symons has it for you). But the rest of the Schottalikes this autumn are pitiful. There's *Fotheringham's Sporting Trivia* and *Sullivan's Music Trivia*, both strikingly similar to the original and thus doomed to ignominious failure. There's *Shite's Unoriginal Miscellany*, a typical Michael O'Mara cash-in, a one-joke book spoofing a book that was already partially spoofing itself. "That's not writing, that's typing," said Truman Capote of Jack Kerouac. Some of these books aren't even typing: they' re downloading. Like the internet, they tend to be littered with mistakes.

And so arrives *Schott's Food & Drink Miscellany*. Unsurprisingly, it's the same mixture as before: the bizarre and the merely interesting rubbing shoulders with the stultifyingly dull. Need a full list of E-numbers? No you don't, but it's here. "Some Culinary Patron Saints"? "Some Films Featuring Cannibalism"? There's something almost admirable in the way Schott manages to strip the humour from a list of things Homer Simpson says "Mmm" about; but again it's the overall effect that's important.

Food & Drink looks beautiful, it's a lovely little thing to hold and browse through, and it will sell many copies, although probably not as many as volume one, because it will be a nice thing to give and receive. That said, there is some good stuff here: rather more, in fact, than there was in the *Original Miscellany*. Maybe the need to concentrate on a single subject has made Schott work harder for his material. Alternatively, he may just have realised that volume one wasn't good enough. As the *Telegraph* column has shown, his interests are becoming increasingly arcane, which may be a natural consequence of spending all your time in libraries researching silly books like this. It could be that, as the years pass, the books actually get better, while the sales figures get worse. It seems a natural progression.

"Sorry sir, we have removed the religion section to make room for Christmas stock"

WORLD OF BOOKS

■ "THE England captain begins Sportsmail's serialisation of his autobiography with an exclusive account of the World Cup Final triumph." This was the publishing coup that the *Daily Mail* announced to readers on 29 November.

In fact the *Mail*'s "exclusive account" was a verbatim repeat of what had already been printed in the *Guardian*'s serialisation five days earlier. Did the *Mail* not read the small print of its contract with publisher Headline, and thus fail to realise that it was buying only "second serial" rights?

Or did it simply assume that its readers wouldn't notice that they were being lied to?

'Bookworm'

REMAINDERS OF THE DAY

■ JOHN BIRT's autobiography, *The Harder Path*, was acquired by Little, Brown's Philippa Harrison for the usual unrecoupable six figures.

It was the epic tale of how John Birt saved LWT and the BBC, and racked up more than 30 years in broadcasting without ever putting a foot wrong. On publication in October 2002 the hardback went for £20 but can now be found at Book Warehouse in central London for just £4.99.

While there, book lovers can also pick up the first volume of Jeffrey Archer's *Prison Diary* for the same price, down from £14.99.

Tales of a librarian
Slag pit, stag sh*t, honey bring is close to my lips. Yes, don't blow those brains yet, we gotta be big boy, we gotta be big.

Starf*#ker just like my Daddy, just like my Daddy selling his baby, just like my Daddy, gonna strike a deal make him feel. Like a Congressman, it runs in the family, gonna strike a deal make him feel, like a Congressman, it runs in the family.

Advertisement for A Tori Amos Collection, *The Times*

Excuse me but can I be you for a while, my DOG won't bite if you sit real still. I got the anti-Christ in the kitchen yellin' at me again.

Yeah I can hear that, been saved again by the garbage truck... but what if I'm a mermaid, in these jeans of his with her name still on it, hey but I don't care, cause sometimes I said sometimes I hear my voice and it's been, HERE silent all these years.

More of the same from the *Guardian*

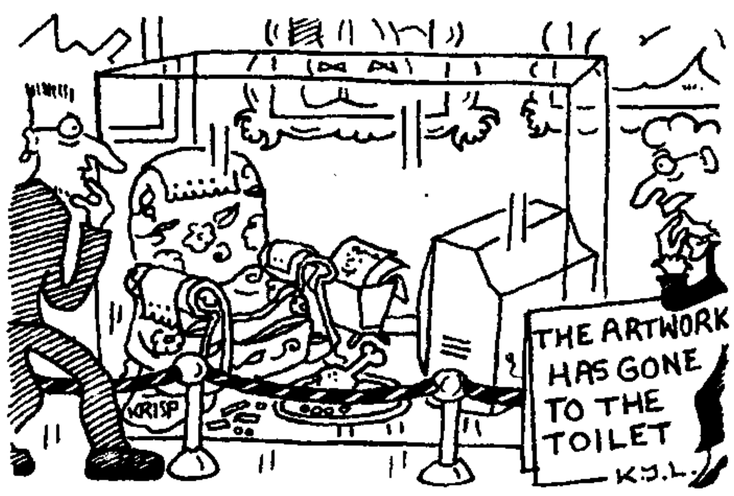
[David] Hume does not invoke my favourite argument in favour of the United Kingdom – that it mirrors the notion of perichoresis or inter-penetration which lies at the heart of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and embodies the paradox of diversity in unity.

DR IAN BRADLEY
Theology

Huso's sculptures are an observation on the female menstrual cycle and are intended to raise the eyebrows of both men and women bemused by this age-old taboo...Using recycled materials such as bicycles, handbags and telephones, in combination with her preferred medium of organic cotton tampons and natural sanitary pads, Huso has created a unique and striking collection of what she terms 'T.art' work for this debut solo exhibition.

Right On – a new collection of conceptual sculptures by Lyn Huso, Coningsbury Gallery, London

Pseuds Corner



Dwarf to live in glass box for art exhibition
A Chilean artist has persuaded a dwarf to live inside a glass box for a month as part of a new exhibition. Roberto Avendano will live inside the one cubic metre glass box, eight hours a day, for a month. Artist Luis Guerra told Las Ultimas Noticias online: "It might be disturbing for some people but I believe that this is one of the objectives of art.

"Roberto will have a chair, a TV and a magazine rack. He will eat his food inside the box and will be allowed to leave to go to the toilet, during which time we will put up a sign saying 'artwork has gone to the toilet'."

Ananova News

For those who visited the spectacle, there were striking satirical ironies to observe in the piece: the weird excitement over the most ordinary reality, the fact that the tremendously visible Blaine was, in his hoody and blanket, indistinguishable from hundreds of other virtually invisible homeless people living on the South Bank. And there was also great beauty: I can't have been the only person who was moved by Blaine's Zen assertion of his private will under the most relentless glare of publicity. He remained inscrutable in an almost heroic way. I am surprised that his endeavour has not been taken more seriously: it's not as if art historical antecedents – Joseph Beuys, Cornelia Parker – are all that hard to think up. But perhaps we will have to wait for Harmony Korine's film of the occasion to realise fully how untrivial it was.

LINDESAY IRVINE
letter to *London Review of Books*

A small country estate with a substantial house of the 1980's epoch.

Country Life

Contributors: Adrian Mann, Ron Alpe, Johnston McKay, J. Bunker, Philip Carter, Jeremy Clark, John Murphy

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

TAX AVOIDANCE

The hungry Caterpillar and the dodging bank

BARCLAYS Bank has just lost a big case at the court of appeal. And since the case involved a tax dodge worth at least £50m to the taxpayer, no one in the overstaffed and overstuffed financial press showed the slightest interest.

Way back in 1995 the big American industrial combine Caterpillar asked Barclays for a big loan. Barclays was only too happy to oblige, and set its highly paid tax dodgers to work on the problem of whether, instead of a simple loan, the bank (and the company) could save tax on the deal.

The Barclays boffins came up with a complex deal whereby a Barclays subsidiary BMBF (No 24) bought £165m worth of machinery from Caterpillar. Of course the bank didn't want the machinery and had no use for it. Thus it stayed in Caterpillar factories in Illinois and was then leased back to Caterpillar through a complex chain of companies in Britain and Bermuda (a tax haven!).

The result, the bank claimed, was that it could claim accelerated tax allowances on the £165m. The net result of the dodge, the bank insisted, was that Caterpillar ended up borrowing only £19m, and Barclays got a tax saving of £50m.

The special tax commissioners ruled the dodge out and Barclays appealed. After an interminable and astonishingly expensive case in November 2002, Mr Justice Etherton knocked the deal on the head. Unabashed, Barclays appealed again and sent its two QCs, John Gardiner and Jonathan Peacock, to the appeal court where lord justices Simon Brown, Chadwick and Rix had to sit for many hours through complex arguments about head leases and financial leases, when all that was really at stake was a tax dodge involving the sale of machinery where no machinery changed hands.

After a 29-page judgment on the 6 November from Lord Justice Chadwick, Barclays lost. These complicated tax dodge cases rarely come to court and are usually settled (at taxpayers' expense). The fact that Barclays' dodge company was numbered 24 indicated the size and scope of the mass avoidance sponsored by the bank and its expensive hirelings.

The judgment was greeted by a surprising silence from Barclays Bank's newest director, Sir Richard Broadbent. *Eye* readers may recall Broadbent in his last incarnation as chairman of Customs and Excise – when that body's elegant and valuable offices were sold to a company in a tax haven. Answering a question from Nigel Beard MP at the Commons select committee in June, Broadbent declared: "Abusive tax avoidance in my view is the obviously legal minimisation of tax liabilities through contrived means which seek to exploit the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law." Somehow Mr Broadbent managed to resist any public denunciation of his own bank after it was exposed in the court of appeal for what, on his own definition, was a blatant case of abusive tax avoidance.

Richard Broadbent

BARRON INQUIRY

BARRON LANDSCAPE

THE Irish government's judicial inquiry into events surrounding the bombing of Dublin and Monaghan in 1974 in which 28 people were killed has finally concluded.

Although it was initially due to have been completed at the beginning of the year, then by the summer, the final report by Justice Henry Barron was not submitted to Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern until the beginning of November. As the *Eye* reported (1067 and 1071), this delay was in part caused by the apparent inertia of Whitehall in supplying requested military files to Barron.

Despite its completion, the report has not yet been disclosed to the public. Why the delay? Most observers concluded that, with elections taking place in the north, the Irish and British governments were reluctant to release anything which could upset an already delicate political situation.

The identity of the bombers – renegade members of the mid-Ulster UVF, nearly all of whom are now dead – has never been in any doubt. Barron was charged with finding out why they were never charged and if they received any help from sympathetic security agents in Ulster. Two former officers in the British army, whom the *Eye* knows to have given evidence to Barron, have already laid bare their suspicions in this respect. Insiders say that as a result Barron is likely to call for a full public inquiry in the north.

One person who could have shed light on all this was Colonel Peter Maynard, who in 2000 was appointed to the position of head of special projects at the ministry of defence. Maynard spent much of the 1970s in the province based with the intelligence unit near Lisburn.

As a then weapons intelligence officer, he was considered a key witness in ascertaining how the UVF, which had not previously been assumed to possess sophisticated explosives expertise and material, had been able to carry out the bombings. Despite invitations from Justice for the Forgotten, the campaign group for bomb victims and their families, and Barron himself, Maynard declined to appear.

The *Eye* asked the MoD if it knew why Maynard had not given evidence and what its attitude was to its employees refusing requests from an inquiry to whom armed forces minister Adam Ingram had earlier promised his full cooperation. An MoD spokeswoman said that as Barron had no jurisdiction in the UK, it was allowing its staff to make their own decisions about helping with inquiries.

PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVE

Amey amiss

AMEY, the private finance initiative (PFI) specialist, is in trouble again (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

This time it's been prosecuted by the health and safety executive (HSE) and fined £16,000 for failing to be in "effective control" of rail works near Birmingham. The HSE was so shocked by the lax safety management it issued a special press release urging other contractors to learn by Amey's mistakes.

The HSE had already warned Amey about poor management of rail sites following incidents at Marlow and Newbury. Indeed, just two months before the latest prosecution in November it had given the firm an "improvement notice".

Amey apparently took no notice. For when HSE investigators made a night visit to the track works, "they found a site where Amey were not effectively managing who was working and where they were. There were engineering train and road-rail plant movements but workmen were not under the protection of a controller of site safety; managers had not attended key planning meetings; and places of safety from train movements described in a safety briefing were, in many places, overgrown and impassable".

Amey is of course a contractor on the London Tube privatisation, along with many school and hospital PFIs. And the fine is an extra embarrassment for Labour, as former cabinet member Margaret Jay is a paid adviser to the company.

A sick idea?

WHO gains from PFI hospitals? Not patients, apparently, nor even the NHS.

A recent *Kenyon Confronts* programme on BBC exposed staff shortages and inadequate healthcare services in three hospitals built under the private finance initiative. The first-ever PFI hospital, Darent Valley in Dartford (below), opened in 2000 with 75 fewer beds than the hospital it replaced. Other shortages then emerged. "The problem with these hospitals," Professor Allyson Pollock told the programme, "is that they are so expensive and costs are having to be met from the budgets that are normally used for patient care."

Not everyone is suffering though. The biggest shareholder in the Darent Valley PFI was Carillion, formerly the construction arm of Tarmac. On 20 November, Carillion sold its investment in the hospital to an investment fund called Barclays UK Infrastructure. The sale brought £5.2m into the company and secured a further "re-financing gain" of £11.2m which the company made in March. Carillion's original investment was £4.1m, so the firm's clear profit is 300 percent in four years.

The sale of the investment in the PFI hospital, Carillion explained, was to provide further funds to, er, invest in further PFI projects. In other words to make a quick buck in order to make an even quicker one.

PORT SHORT

SAFETY inspectors are being pulled from essential work in Britain's most dangerous industries to bolster the work of the railways inspectorate, in what many suggest is an over-reaction to recent well-publicised accidents (see *Signal Failures*, p10.)

As the increase in work on the railways has put immense pressure on health and safety executive (HSE) budgets, the agency has had to cut its field operations division (FOD) by 50 out of its 590 staff, thus reducing the number of investigations and inspections it can carry out by around 10,000 a year. FOD deals with safety in the construction, agriculture and manufacturing industries, where the majority of fatal accidents at work occur.

The safety inspectors' union Prospect has warned that "robbing Peter to pay Paul" rather than increasing the overall number of inspectors simply wouldn't work. The warning followed a call last month from the transport select committee for more dedicated port inspectors.

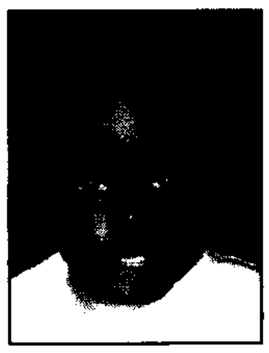
Ports and docks are the most dangerous places to work onshore in Britain, with a whopping 3,000 accidents per 100,000 workers – considerably higher than even the accident-prone construction industry. But as the report says: "There is an acute shortage of dedicated port inspectors to fulfil the obligations of the HSE... We expect the HSE to set a timetable for the recruitment of a sufficient number of inspectors together with the provision of an effective training programme."

Such expectations are not matched by any new funding, however. In fact, the inspectors' union grumbles, the budget for the next three years shows a 10 percent reduction in real terms.

WEST MIDLANDS POLICE

Aidan abetting

THREE West Midlands police officers have been given slapped wrists for botching the search for a missing child who froze and starved to death before he was found.



Two-year-old Aidan Green (pictured) disappeared from his mother's home in Walsall in February 2000. The toddler was eventually found dead from hypothermia and starvation at the home of his father, Sponford Antonio Green, in April almost eight weeks later.

Police have always refused to say whether they had searched the father's house during extensive door to door inquiries, even though the boy was last seen being looked after by his father at his mother's house (the couple lived separately). But neighbours reported that uniformed officers had visited the property several times during the time the boy was missing; and Aidan's mother, Dorrett White, told police repeatedly that she believed the boy was with his father.

While the local papers were running pictures of the little boy and appealing for the public's help in finding him, the youngster was lying abandoned. What makes his case all the worse is that the house was only a few hundred yards from the town's main police station. The toddler's body was eventually found by burglars entering the apparently empty property. They made an anonymous call to police.

Local councillor Moses Whyte has criticised the police handling of the investigation saying the community feels the missing child case was largely dismissed as a black-on-black domestic dispute. Locals make the comparison with Soham, where police pulled out all the stops in the hunt for the two missing girls. "It doesn't matter who it is that's gone missing, cases should be treated the same, especially when a young child is involved," said Mr Whyte.

Green later admitted Aidan's manslaughter and was jailed in 2001. Judge Frank Chapman accepted that he had not intended the toddler to die and had been suffering from clinical depression when he abandoned his son. Given the devastating circumstances in which he himself had grown up (both his own parents committed suicide) it was perhaps not surprising he was depressed.

The police complaints authority (PCA) investigation was opened later in 2001, with Greater Manchester police looking into the way the search was conducted and concluded. Three officers – two inspectors and a sergeant – pleaded guilty at a misconduct hearing and were formally reprimanded. Another two officers who were investigated were not subject to any disciplinary procedure. Meanwhile the crown prosecution service also looked at the findings of the investigation and decided not to bring criminal charges.

Extraordinarily, linked to the case is a second PCA supervised investigation into West Midlands police. While released on licence in 2002, Sponford Green jumped from a 13th storey window in Coventry after police tried to arrest him for breach of prison parole, and died. Detectives from Humberside are conducting that investigation.

Police have refused to name the officers who were reprimanded, either to the local press or to the *Eye*. It's interesting to consider what would have happened had social workers botched the case of the missing youngster, or indeed if Aidan had been a middle-class white boy. Apart from a few brief paragraphs of agency copy from the trial in 2001, there has been no national newspaper outcry and no public witch hunt to attach blame for the unnecessary death.

The Lincs effect

WHEN Mr Justice Newman was forced to call a dramatic halt to the trial of five men accused of a gangland-style murder conspiracy because police officers had been illegally bugging the men's conversations with their lawyers, he was furious.

Allowing the men who had been accused of being involved in the shooting of 23-year-old Mark Corley to walk free from Nottingham crown court, the judge accused the Lincolnshire officers of "affronting justice in a grave way". He added: "The court will not countenance flagrant breaches of the law."

So what happened to the officers accused of this "flagrant breach of the law"? Three months ago the crown prosecution service (CPS) decided there was insufficient evidence to bring charges against five officers. Last week the police complaints authority (PCA) decided that eight should receive a mere ticking off (formally known as "receiving words of advice") or an informal warning and three got a slapped wrist – a written warning

Which is not bad when you consider they so cocked up a murder case that five men who were believed to have been involved in shooting Mark Corley in the back of the head and dumping his body on farmland got off without a trial.

ACCOUNTANCY

Ethics men

AFTER the Enron debacle, the British government brought the old auditing practices board (APB) under the wing of its emboldened accountancy regulator, the financial reporting council. Its first job was to promote new "ethical standards" for auditors.

It set up a special "ethics group" which has just come up with a draft of five "ethical standards" for auditors. All these standards have been welcomed by the big four accountancy firms, perhaps because none of them will cost the firms a penny.

One big worry for the accountants was the clamour for separating auditing and consultancy work. On this controversial matter, the new proposals suggest no action. Instead, ethical standard 5 "sets out a conceptual framework to govern an assessment of the appropriateness of an audit firm providing non-audit services to an audit firm". Or, to put it another way, the big accountancy firms decide for themselves whether it's ethical to take on lucrative consultancy work for the firms whose accounts they are supposed to be auditing.

In case there is any doubt about the ethics of it all, the APB announces that it "does not consider that the imposition of a limit on fees receivable from non-audit services would be appropriate". Phew, what a relief.

Here is an alphabetical list of the eight members of the APB's "ethics group" that compiled the report. See if you can pick out anyone from any of the big four accountancy firms:

Richard Fleck, partner, City solicitors Herbert Smith; John Grant, director APB; Michael Hughes, partner, KPMG; David Lindsell, partner Ernst & Young; Andrew Palmer, finance director Legal & General; Graham Pimlott, non-executive director of Tesco and formerly of Barclays; Stuart Turley, professor of accounting at Manchester University; Graham Ward, partner PricewaterhouseCoopers.

DR CONGO

Timid Timms

WILL Stephen Timms, the spare minister at the department of trade allegedly in charge of "corporate responsibility", do anything about British firms who are involved in gaily plundering the mineral wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo?

Given the government's record, a consistent cover-up of corporate irresponsibility is more likely. And on 5 November, when Timms answered a parliamentary question from Labour backbencher Ann McKechin, he was in suitably lame form.

McKechin broached the ticklish subject of the big firms who do business in the so-called Democratic (ie wholly undemocratic) Republic of Congo. A UN security council resolution a few days earlier had instructed governments to investigate the companies named in the various bloodcurdling reports of the UN panel of experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Congo killing fields.

The MP asked the minister what plans the government had to investigate the British companies named. Timms replied that the DTI was "aware" of the panel's report. He was also "aware" that his government played a crucial role in the international organisation charged with carrying out the UN mandate on these matters. Timms then announced that the role of that organisation "is to facilitate a dialogue between the two parties with a view to resolving the issues raised in this situation". He regretted that the DTI really couldn't do much mediating because the UN panel had dissolved.

This pathetic statement drew rage and mockery from the Lib Dems who had been pressing DTI ministers to toughen up their investigative resources on the corporate exploitation of the Congo. In a Lords debate on 3 December, Lord Avebury mocked the view, which he attributed to Timms, that the role of the government was to "act as a messenger boy between the accused and the UN".

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **NAREY, NAREY QUITE CONTRARY:** Congratulations to Martin Narey, Britain's new US-style "commissioner for correctional services". He has been awarded a Chartered Management Institute Gold Medal Award for his previous role as prisons chief for "raising the ambitions of the Prison Service, providing a clear and motivating vision and developing the public profile and perception of its work."

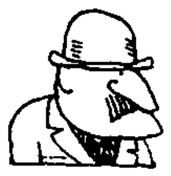
Can this be the same former prisons chief who was castigated by the Commons home affairs committee for sanctioning the botched raid on Blantyre House, the country's most successful resettlement prison, and ousting its highly-praised governor, Eion McLelland Murray — and then attempting to mislead MPs over the debacle?

On his first appearance before the committee Narey said: "The total amount of damage is in the region of £400." When re-examined the following month he admitted the figure was more than £6,000. His "considerable quantity of pornographic material" turned out to be a mere seven photographs – somewhat modest, you might think, in a jail of more than 100 men.

The committee was very "dissatisfied" at the attempt to mislead its members and said so. But as Sir David Ramsbotham, the former chief inspector of prisons, made clear in his book *Prison Gate*, the incident spoke volumes about prison attitudes and Narey's judgement. He had backed the area manager Tom Murtagh, a known bully for his "robust management style", against a man whose record proved that rehabilitation in jail can work. Great management skills indeed.

■ **FOOTBALL:** What happened to John Gregory, whose transactions while manager at Aston Villa (and his relationship with Cheshire football agency Proactive), were highlighted in the *Eye* more than a year ago?

As readers will recall, Proactive's lawyers howled with indignation and threatened legal action against the *Eye*. The *Eye* replied as calmly as ever, and the threatened action never materialised. Then on 30 November the *News of the World* reported that a "detailed dossier" on the subject had been compiled and is likely to result in drastic action soon.

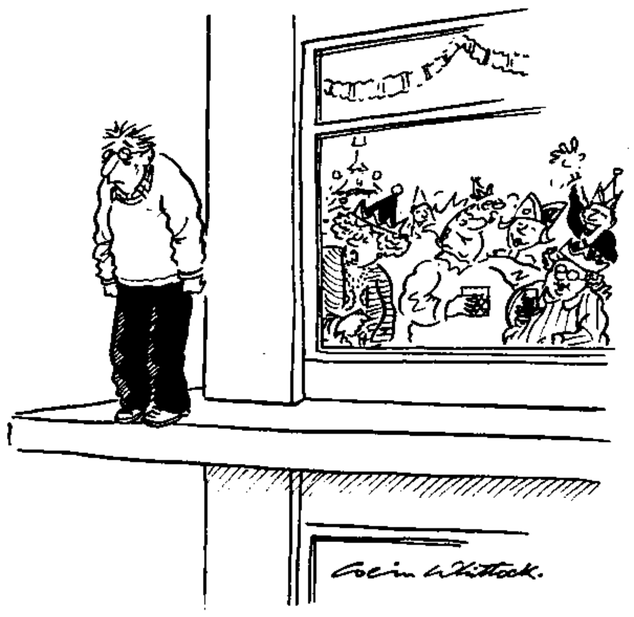


In the City

SUGGESTIONS that the over-borrowed phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed is "preparing a bid" for the *Telegraph* titles are as risible as they are predictable.

Even the *Observer*, which first suggested this possibility, was in the same breath forced to admit there was some question as to whether Fayed could afford the £400m-plus required to buy titles that have been relentlessly critical of him. The accounts for Fayed's Harrods empire which appeared days later suggest that is a very big question indeed.

Faced with continuing unimpressive trading at Harrods, Fayed has been forced to boost his borrowings with a second bank loan – despite borrowing up to £350m for 20 years in 2000 from Royal Bank of Scotland. This year has seen a new £5.5m loan to be repaid over five years, taking total borrowings by his Harrods Holdings master company to £342.5m at year end. To that must added nearly another £100m owed by the Paris Ritz to RBS and probably more than £30m to Bradford & Bingley secured on his Park Lane apartments.



"Hold on, Kevin's just dashed off to fetch his new video camera!"

Fayed's need to borrow more has been increased by the lacklustre performance of the once top people's Knightsbridge store which managed to push sales up by a mere 3 percent to £461m but saw profits down two thirds due to increased costs, including interest, from £22m to £7m.

But the real damage is in the cash flow. The amount of net cash generated by the store fell and at the parent company level there was a net cash outflow of £22m so that by the end of its financial year last February Fayed had £30m less cash in the business than a year before. Hardly a basis from which to persuade bankers to lend a further £400m, even if they take the *Telegraph* titles as security which they would have to do (just as RBS now holds the keys to Harrods and the Ritz).

Signs of the cash squeeze within the Fayed empire are manifest. After pouring around £100m into Fulham, Fayed has closed the cheque book. Ironically the premiership team is having its best season – perhaps because the now non-resident Fayed cannot meddle. Harrods and other companies are selling properties: £22m last year. Last month the London heliport was sold.

No wonder Fayed has been forced to cut the amount he extracts from Harrods Holdings via dividends from £74m to £11.5m, all having to come from reserves and to the detriment of cash flow. But then how else to fund Fulham and his lifestyle.

Add to the mix a £86m hole in the Harrods pension fund which will need to be filled, and it is indeed not hard to see why there should be questions over whether Mohamed Fayed could afford to buy a copy of the *Telegraph* singular.

LORD Acton always had it right about absolute power corrupting absolutely. Eventually those with the power do the excessive things they do just because they can. Conrad Black was just such an abuser of his position with shareholders' money.

Consider his purchase of letters and other papers written by former US president Franklin D. Roosevelt for $8m. At the time Black was working on a book about FDR which has just been published. Hollinger International has never publicly explained this purchase, first revealed by the *Financial Times* earlier this year.

Black says the price paid was less than the appraised value. However, an FDR expert told the *Wall Street Journal* he was "very surprised" at the $8m price tag. A view with which none other than Lord Black obviously agreed. He told the *FT* that he did not buy the FDR papers himself because "$8m was not something I was prepared to spend". But it was perfectly acceptable for Hollinger shareholders to spend company money for his benefit.

That purchase could create a UK tax problem for Black who is now presumably UK resident if not domiciled for tax purposes. If Black was the only person to enjoy the use of the FDR papers (which seems the case as they were not on show in Hollinger's offices) then, like artwork acquired for company chairmen and used to decorate their homes, this could be a taxable benefit. In which case the rule is that there is a tax of 20 percent of the market value each year at, what in Black's case would be his top income tax rate of 40 percent. Doubtless any challenge by the taxman will be met with the retort by Black that the papers are a company asset. But it is hard to see how the company has benefited, especially if they are now sold at a loss.

THE bizarre events at Azure Holdings, formerly Room Service Group – shares suspended due to market makers going short of more shares than are in issue – has again exposed the lax controls barely exercised by City regulators on the AIM market.

Azure has all the hallmarks of a re-run of what happened at Hanover Capital earlier this year. The far from impressive track records of those behind Hanover were detailed in *Eye* 1073. Two months later the shares were suspended after the nominated adviser Grant Thornton jumped ship. A month later the AIM listing was cancelled, marooning all those onboard.

One of the players identified as behind Hanover Capital was Peter Abbey. And it is Abbey who has emerged vulture-like to pick over the Hanover wreckage, alighting on three shell companies where it had been planned to utilise their AIM listings by acquiring shares for debt (because the companies had no money to pay) and then promising to find a deal to revamp their share price. Mali gold prospects were injected into Hanover and Central Asian gold interests proposed for Underwriting & Subscription.

Not surprisingly given his history, Abbey was not publicly involved with Hanover but was active behind the scenes. Now he is very much the man up front in the new plans for both Azure and Underwriting & Subscription, which never seems to have actually acquired the Israeli-owned gold mine in Kyrgyzstan, plus Prestige Publishing.

The Monaco-based former dentist is acting through a Gibraltar company, Chiddingfold Investments, which has acquired control of all three companies after shares-for-debt swaps. In the case of U&S and Prestige he acquired debts owed to Hanover which was also owed money by the former Room Service. More shares have then been issued for 1p to Abbey and his pals giving them control of both Azure and U&S.

Abbey's partners include an Edward Simons, presumably no relation to the former finance man long associated with busted-out promoter Harvey Goldsmith. That Simons is currently running Sports & Leisure whose shares have halved to 4.5p.

Interestingly Chiddingfold first emerged in April as the purchaser of the trading assets of Sportsetail, the internet merchandising business controlled by Hay & Robertson, after the company went into administration. Sportsetail has contracts with Manchester United and the Football Association. Hay & Robertson, whose shares are now suspended, was controlled by the family interests of another Monaco resident and old *Eye* favourite – Paul Levinson. Levinson stepped in to help "rescue" Harvey Goldsmith.

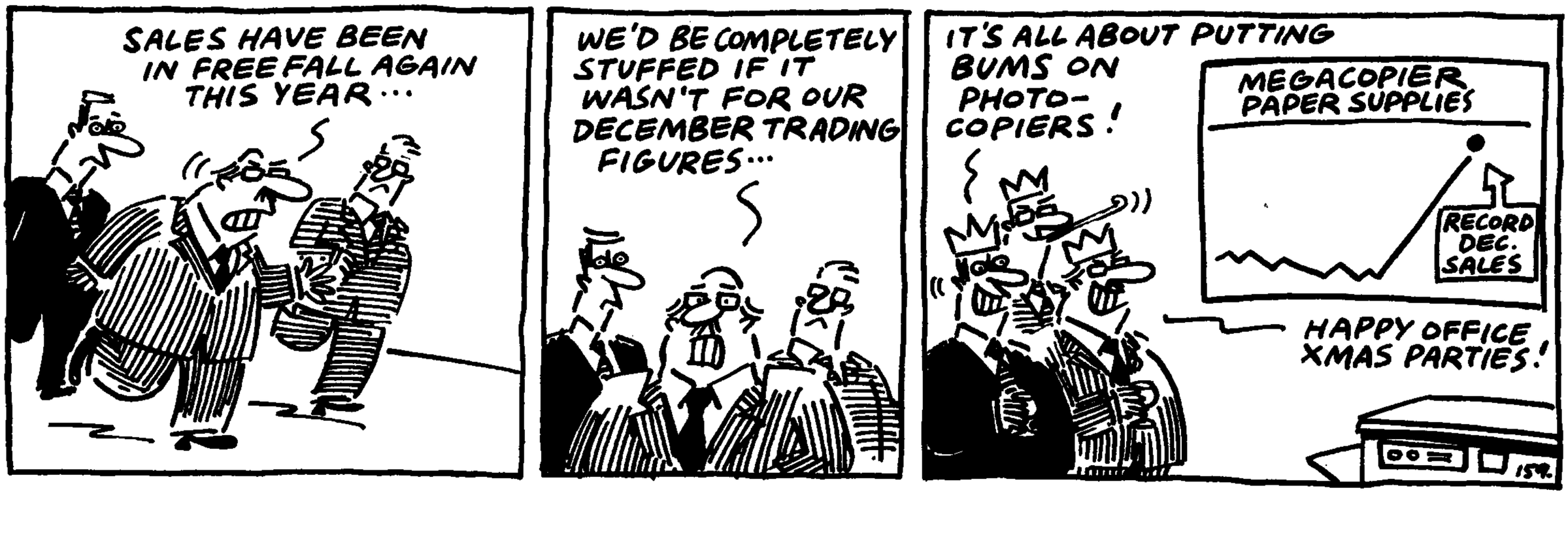
Also involved with Abbey are Atlantic Law, the London solicitors run by failed entrepreneur Andrew Greystoke (once threatened with both bankruptcy and disqualification as a director). Atlantic Law specialises in the clients other lawyers are happy to avoid – such as Merton Securities whose own clients included the Russian mafia. Only this week Atlantic Law was rightly blasted by the *Financial Mail on Sunday* for approving material targeting British investors from Spanish-based worthless share peddlers Hoffman Philips, who are not authorised to conduct investment business in Britain.

Like Levinson, Peter Abbey first came to notice when video stores were hot in the 1980s. He featured in the video nasties Home Video and later Video Store. Abbey then joined forces with share promoter Tom Wilmot of Harvard Securities in such expensive flameouts as Firecrest and Skynet.

In February 1997 Meteor Technology issued a

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG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Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Last year's worst stocking fillers

Value of £100 invested last Christmas in...

£17	Invensys (engineering)
£16	Pace Micro (electronics)
£15	Xenova (biotech)
£5	MyTravel (holidays)
£3	Telewest (cable TV)
£2	British Energy (nuclear power)

statement ɔ the stock exchange stating that, contrary t what it had been told by Wilmot and Abbey, th y still owned shares in the company. Meteor w ɜ asked by the stock exchange to confirm t at it had "no continuing commercial or other relat ɔnship" with Abbey or his companies.

Abbey ɜ company Detailprofit Trading, which did busine ɜ as Abercorn Investments, ceased trading in 997 and was dissolved in 2000. Zebra Group, for nerly computer concern RMT Group and where Abbey had been a consultant, issued a statutory c mand for £87,000 against Detailprofit in Novembe 1997 over shares in Meteor plus options in other A M companies which it claimed had been held in tru t by Abercorn but sold and half the money no handed over. Abbey denied these claims and issuec libel proceedings against Zebra.

The m tter was later resolved after Abbey entered in ɔ a voluntary arrangement with his creditors ' hich was expected to generate not much mo ɜ than 10p in the £. Recently Atlantic Law appr ached the board of Zebra, which has shares bu no longer a listing, with a putative offer from an u idisclosed client. Zebra suspected it was Abbey an l said no thank you.

With ɜ ich a stellar record it is hard to understoc l how even on the wilder shores of the AIM mar et Abbey can be allowed to take control of three li ted companies. The financial services authority FSA) would have us believe that under new aggr sive management it is looking to protect inv stors. It could start by protecting those in Azure H ldings, Underwriting & Subscriptions and Prestig Publishing from Peter Abbey.

ABBAS OKAL, who holds the distinction of receivin the longest sentence ever for fraud from a Britis judge (14 years in 1997), has been released in ti e for the civil mega-trial due to start next month i which the liquidators of the Bank of Conmen and ocaine International attempt to collect more an £500m from the Bank of England for f ling to regulate BCCI.

Gokal and is family were the biggest single borrowers fro BCCI. More than $800m went through his co panies from BCCI.

However, it till seems that Gokal got off lightly. He was lso sentenced to an additional three years if he lid not pay just under £3m plus interest to the BC CI creditors. This sentence was upheld by the cou t of appeal in 2001 shortly before Gokal was ue for parole having served half his sentence – he h d been in custody since 1994.

Gokal never pai a penny of the £3m but was still released in Sept nber having served an additional two-plus y rs. The reason? By law prisoners must be rele ed after serving two-thirds of their original sentence unless there are exceptional circumstances. This also applies to sentences given in relation to compensation orders.

But the SFO could have missed out on one last chance to recoup some money from Gokal whose six-month trial was estimated to have cost the taxpayer £4m in legal aid. Prosecution costs were put at another £1m. The SFO could have asked for a costs order to be enforced against Gokal but never did and now it is too late.

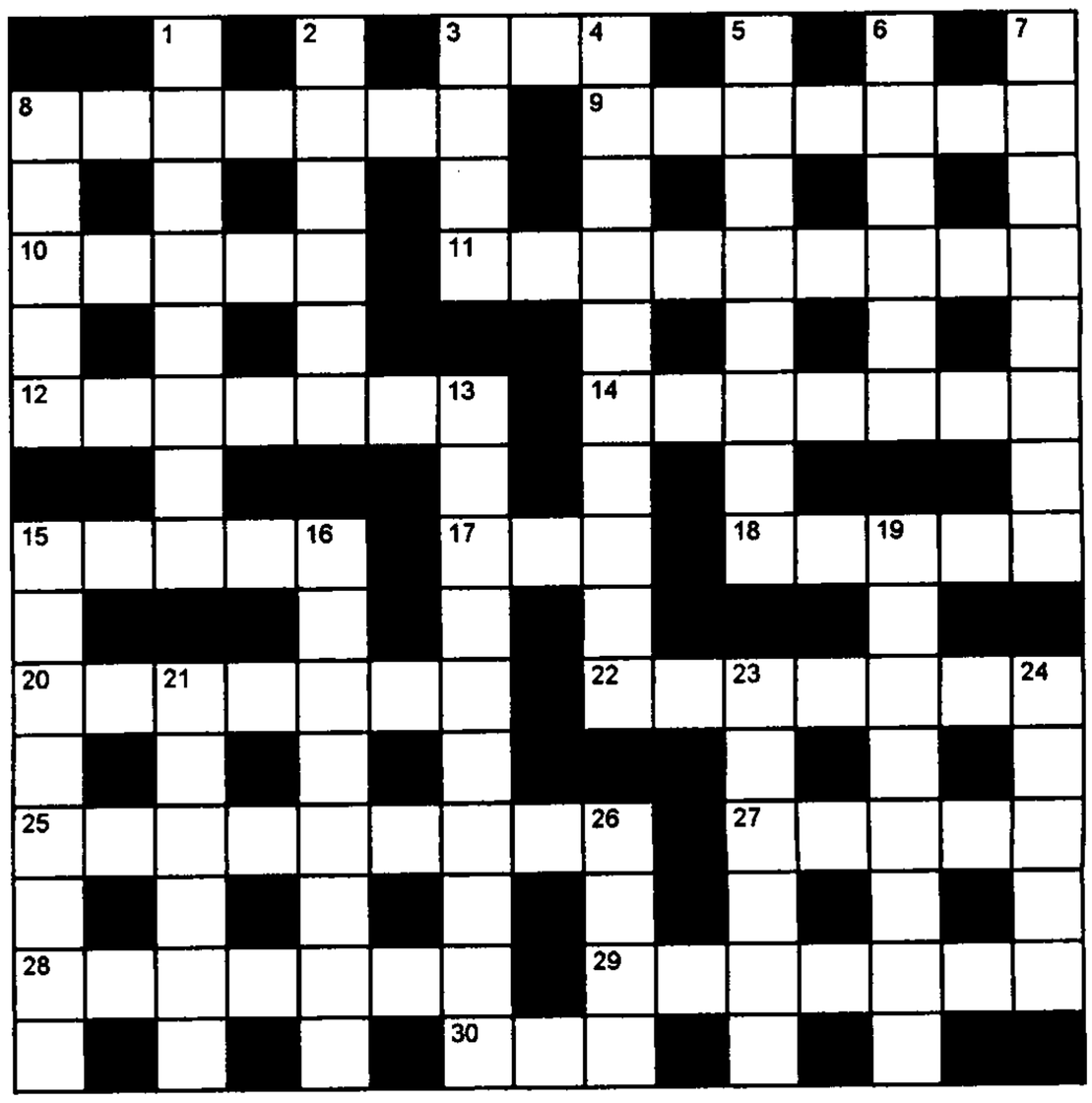
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 250

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 17 December 2003.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

3 *Arousing Bill Clinton: Openings and the Basics* (3)
8 Mouthy expression of disgust when left out of oral sex activity? (7)
9 Flipping crap alternative about foot of aerial position? (7)
10 Very extreme in artful transvestites? (5)
11 Sticking up two fingers, fiddled with G-string and topless Sue (9)
12/17/21 Rear encouragement from perverted KKK archetype, Ubi H. (1,4,2,3,6)
14 See 17
15 Jerks off Nasser namelessly (5)
17/14 He screwed around with a sedated Jordan's mouth here (3,4,3) (see also 12 ac.)
18/27 Titled men solicit (arrested we hear) on the Tube (5,5)
20 Birk so mean to get rid of bar – a pain in the arse (7)
22 Spicy things love penetrating Weller's, like (7)
25 Ken's office spreading alarm about what the kids on the street call gutless Tony (9)
27 See 18
28 Be inclined, in exam, to be a scrubber? (7)
29 Bush's fruitful pickings shrivelled up? Maybe Iran's is (7)
30 Pete's partner with Dandy, getting end away (3)

DOWN

1 Extremes of Bill and Monica, rising to smears of "does not have sexual relations" (8)
2 *Hello!* recruits Frost – possible high level seizure results! (6)
3 Enthusiastic attempt to get inside a girl's top (4)
4 Don Juan's, although a Juanita? (5-5)
5 Couple doing place out (8)
6 Produced by careless onanists? No getting away from it (6)
7 Used to get close-up view of G spot first on girl? (8)
8 A Dutch wedge in crack, put by loyalists? (5)
13 Like a Teletubby, a Teletubby drawn hugging Martin (3-7)
15 I am butch, screwed up and unreasonable (1,3,4)
16 Blokes' skirts accessories: crosses with gold right inside (8)
19 Mystic well in with royalty puts Iran in the shit (8)
21 See 12 Across
23 Help and fashionable shit at the start (4,2)
24 Home Counties knockers one's taken for paving blocks (5)
26 Back-beam indicator of substantial bust made by CID (4)

Crossword 249 winner: PETER WEDDERBURN

ACROSS: 1/26/29 Stark bollock-naked 4 Strip club 9 Logical 10 Pub grub 11 Milosevic 12 Celeb 13 Dachas 14 Stuffing 17 Scratchy 19 Plucky 22 Eight 24 Zeitgeist 27 Provost 28 Rhapsodic.

DOWN: 1 Salem 2 Angelic 3 Kickstart 4 Saliva 5 Rapacity 6 Pubic 7 Lorelei 8 Baby buggy 13 Dismember 15 Full-grown 16 Whizz kid 18 Regalia 20 Chinook 21 Biopic 23 Trots 25 Toted.

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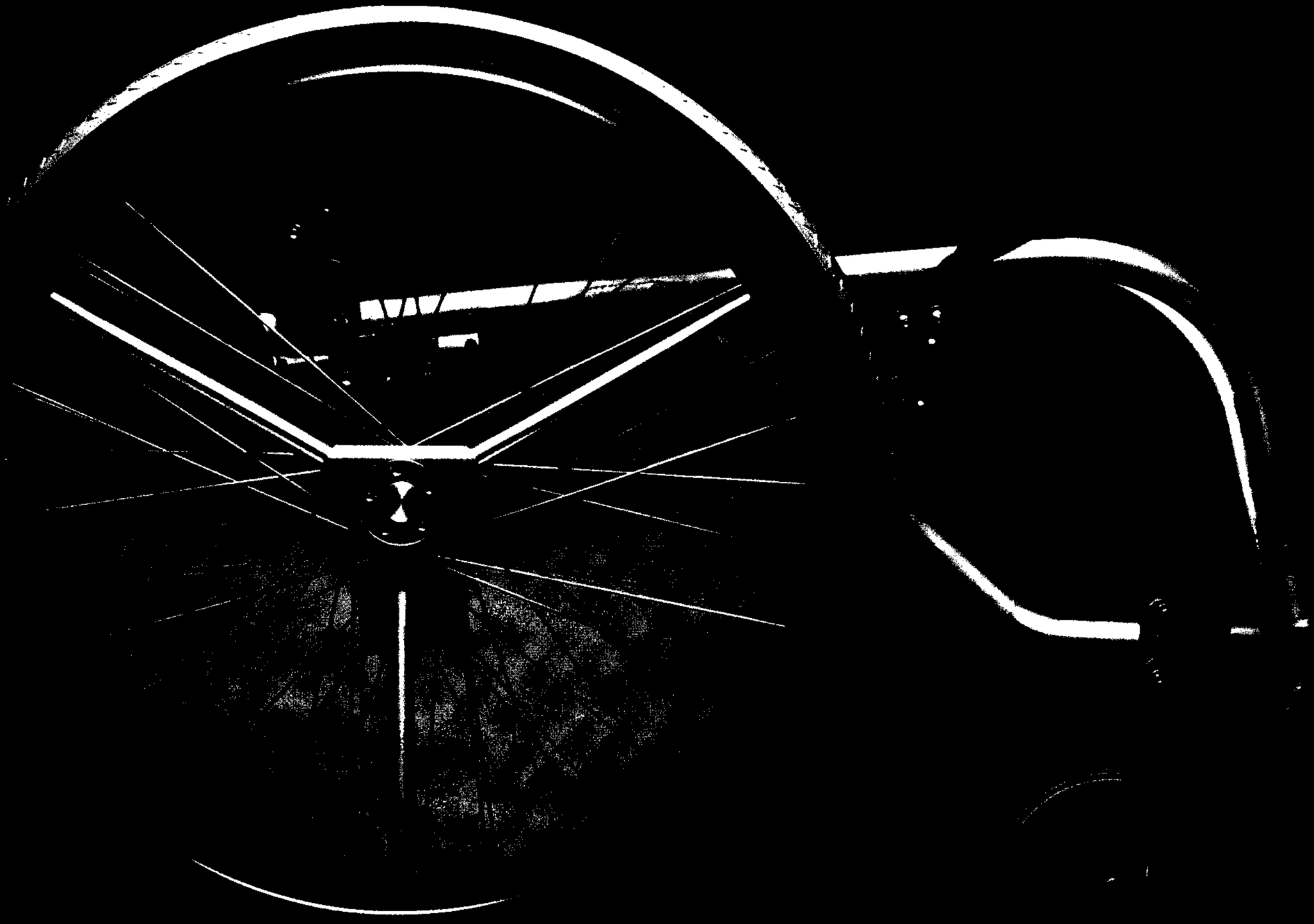

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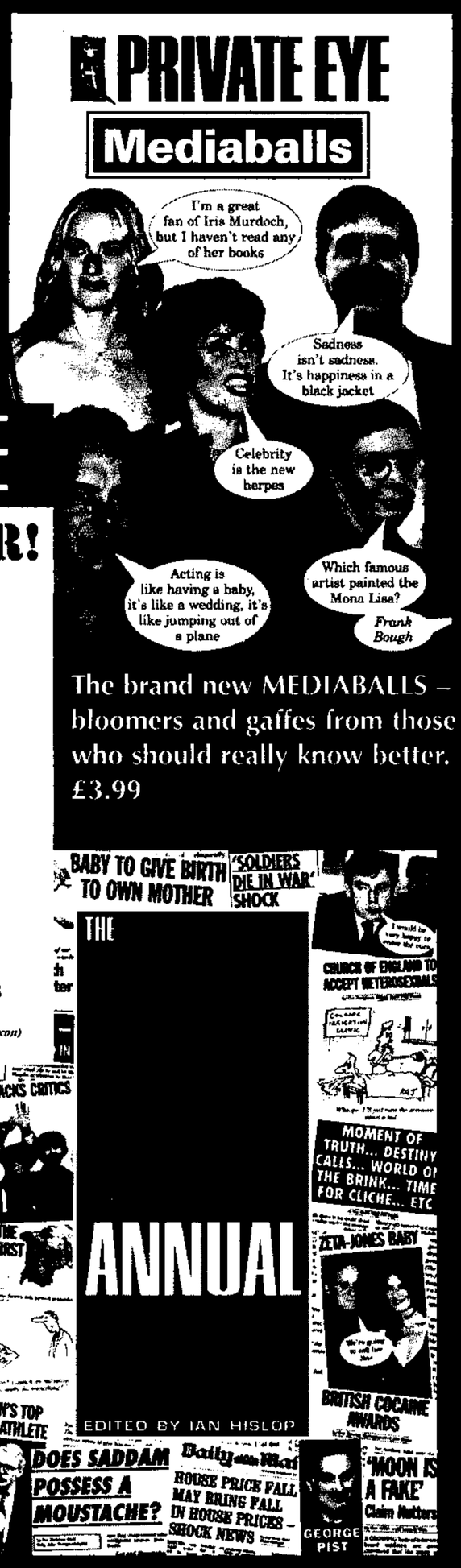
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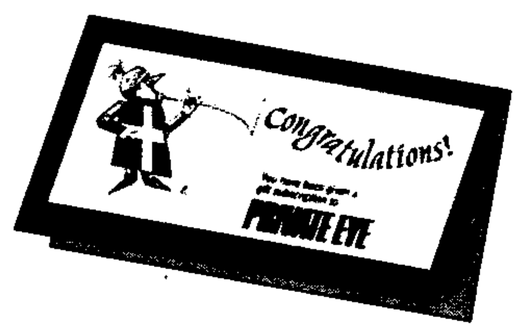

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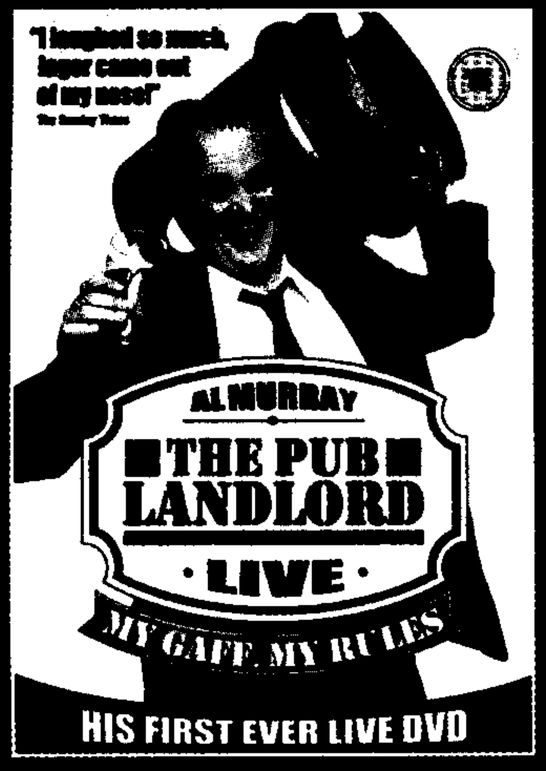

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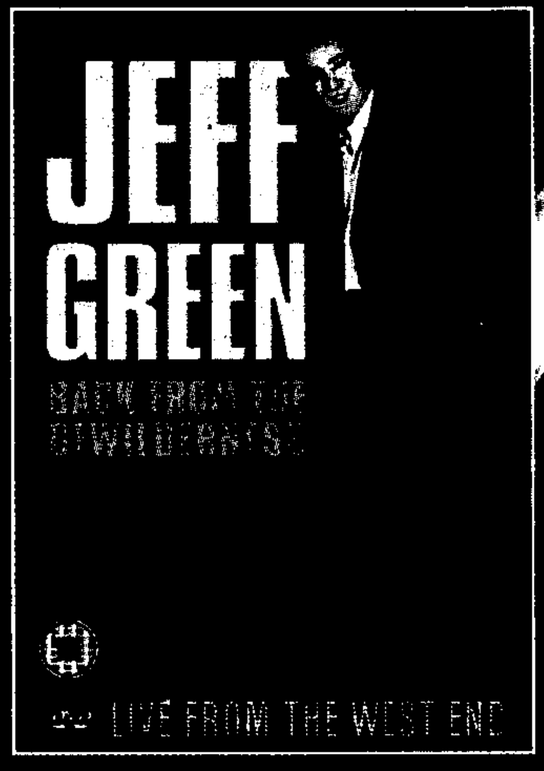

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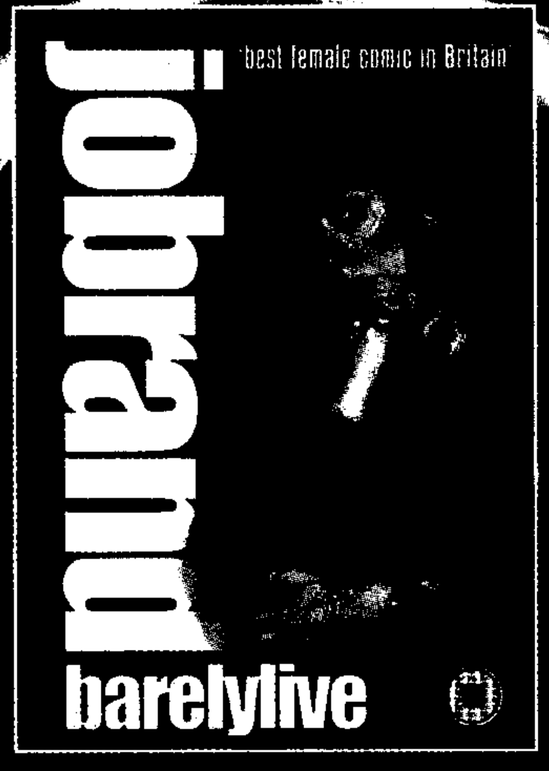

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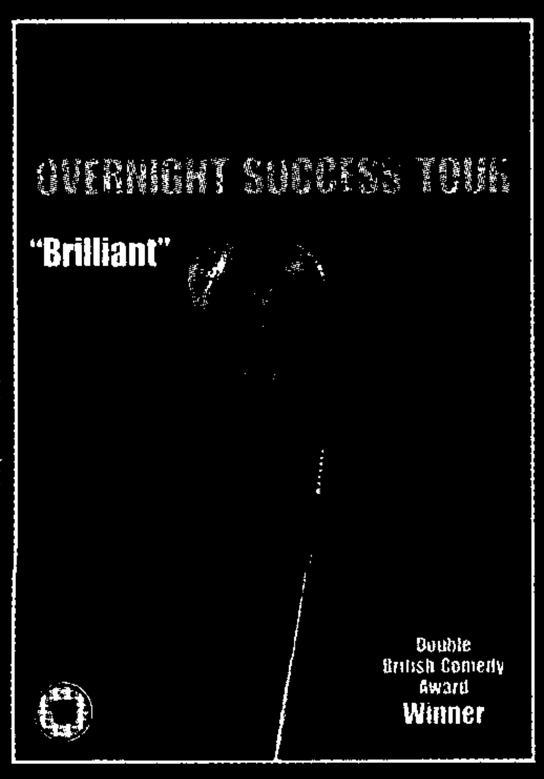

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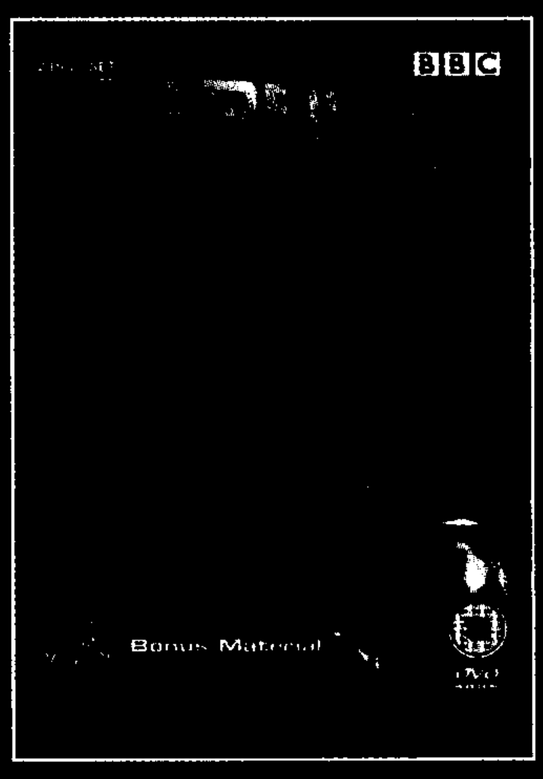

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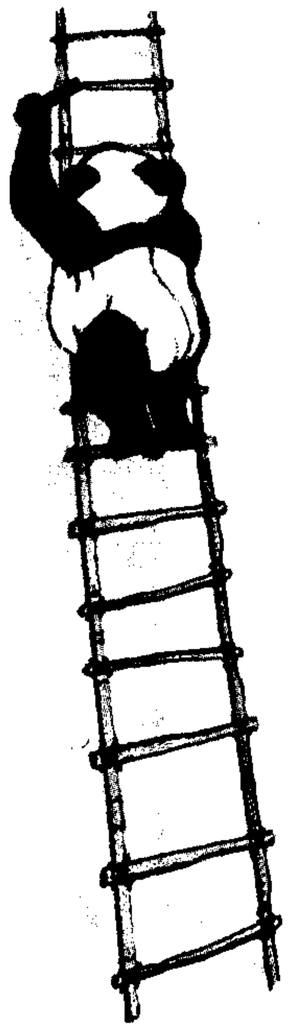

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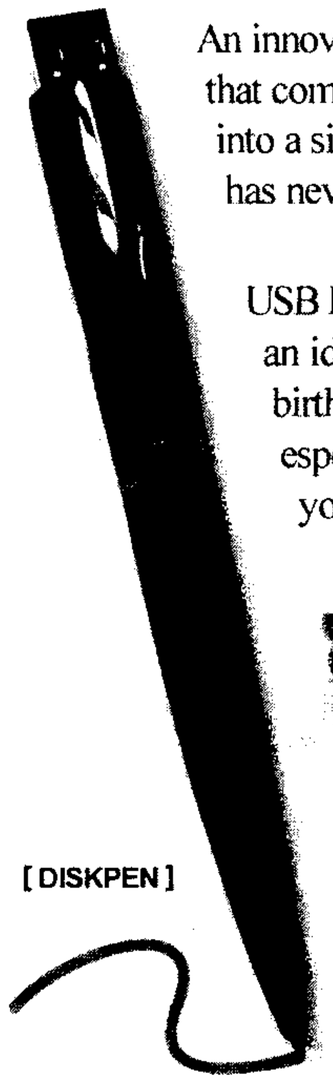

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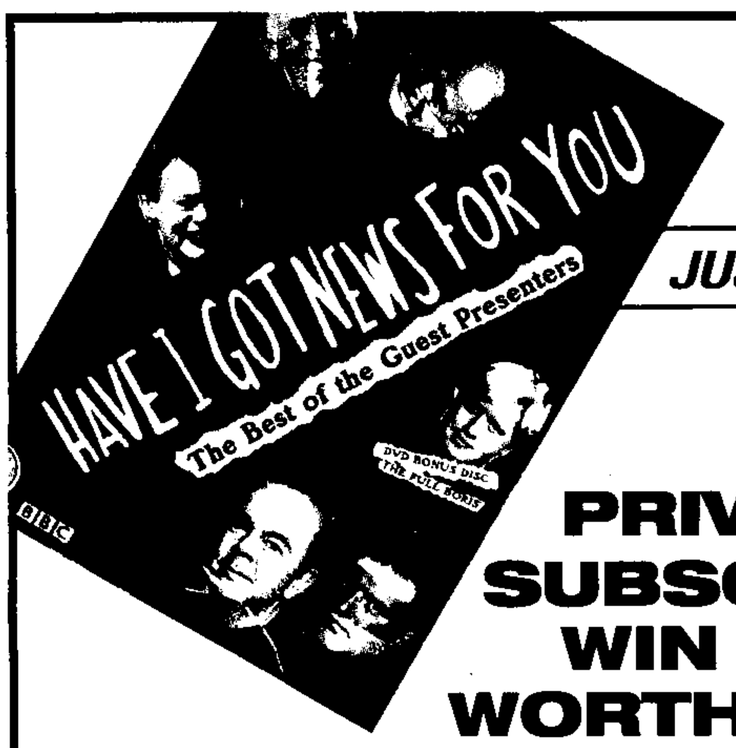

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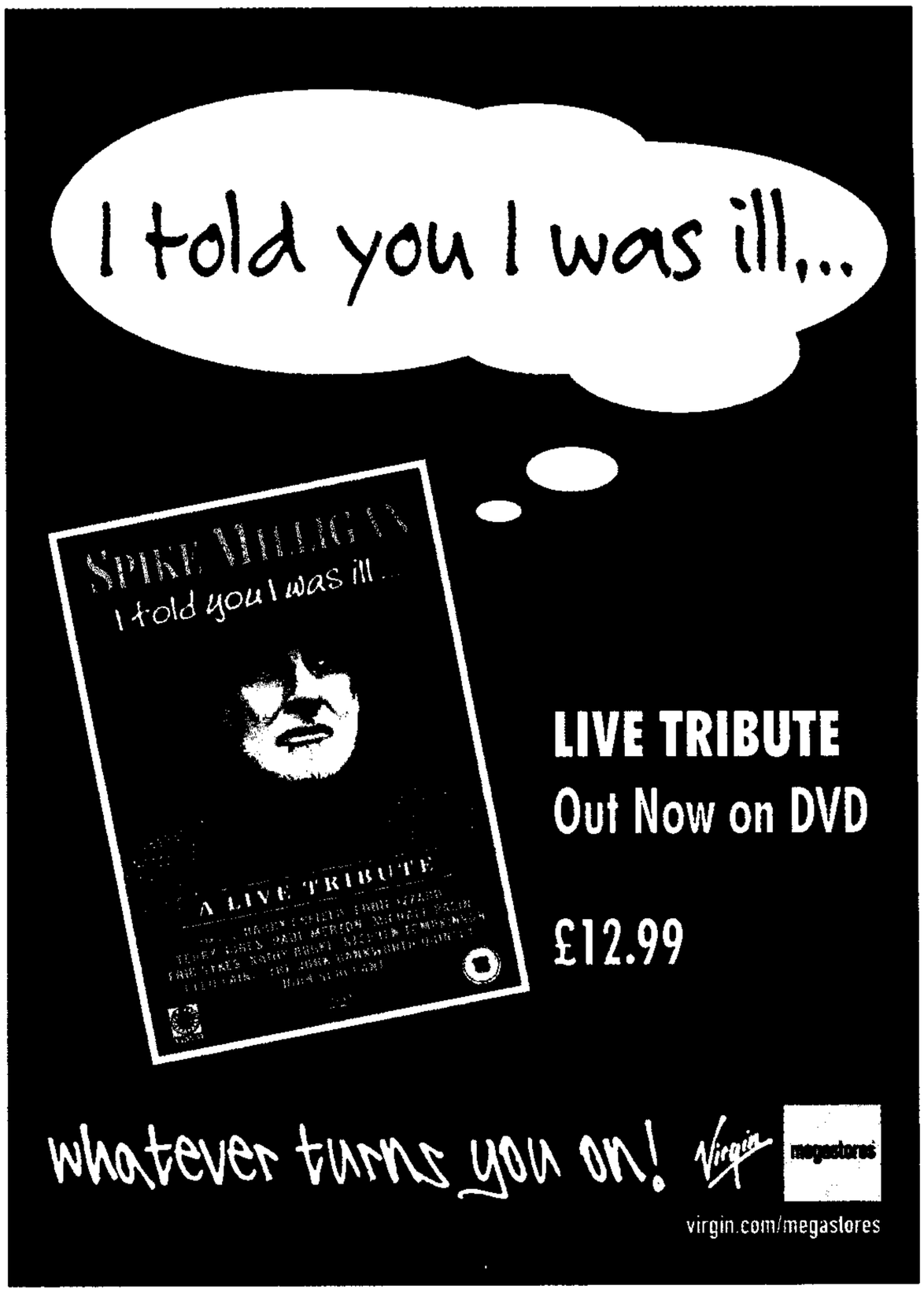

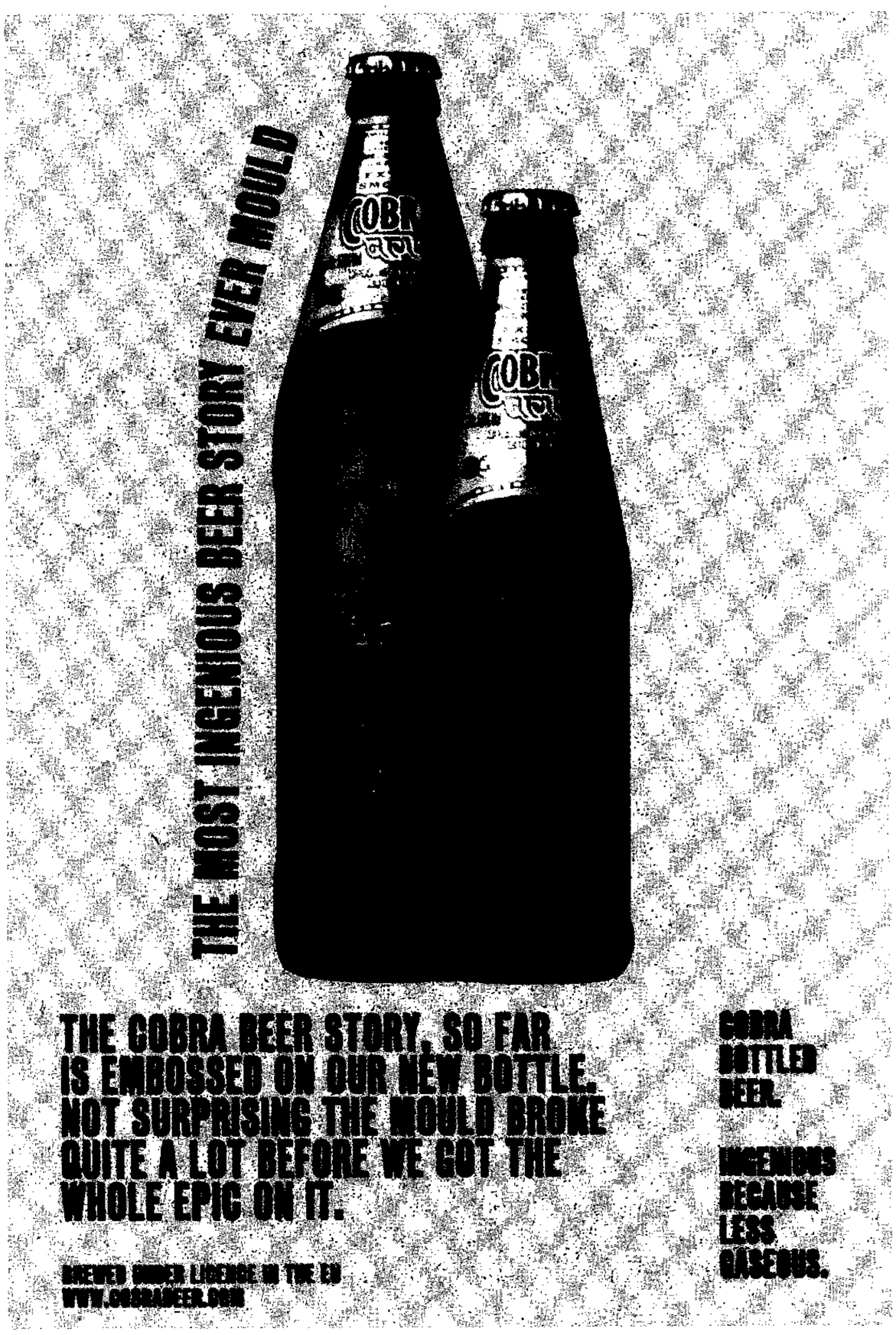
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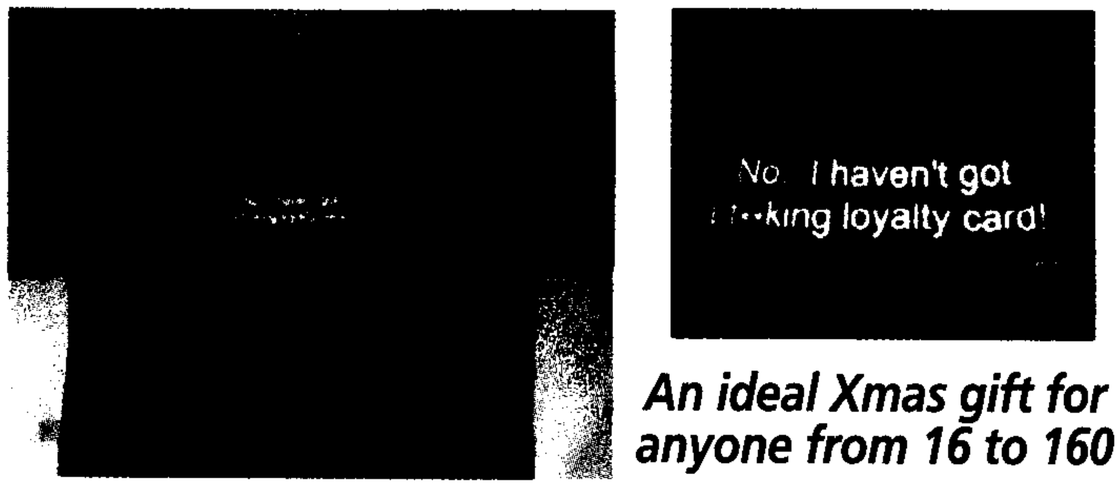

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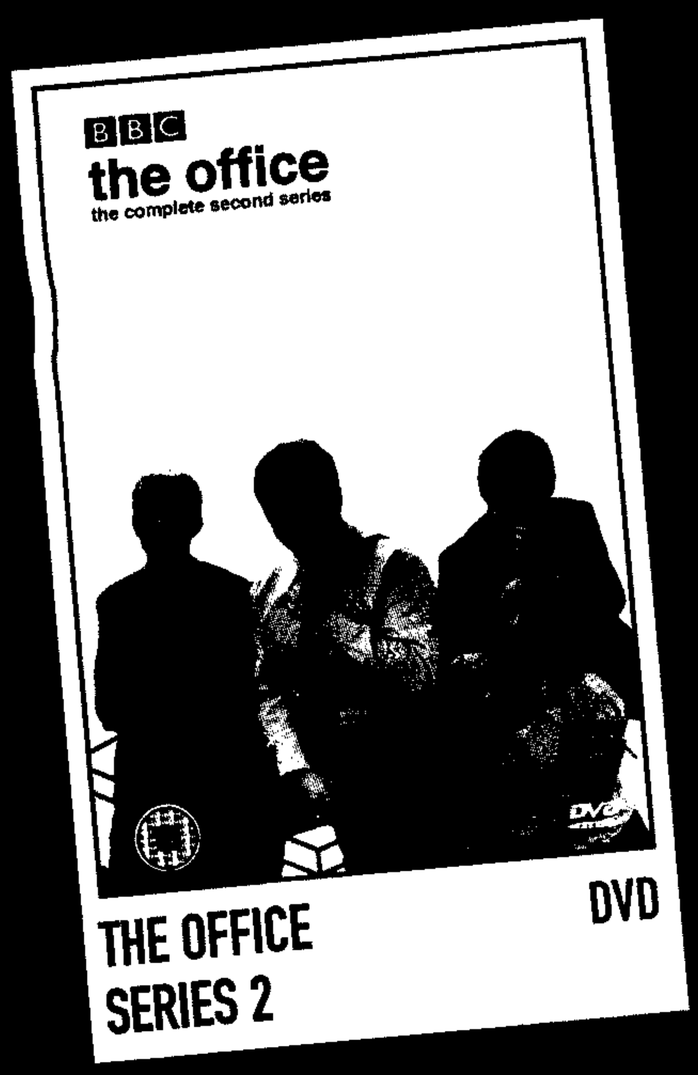

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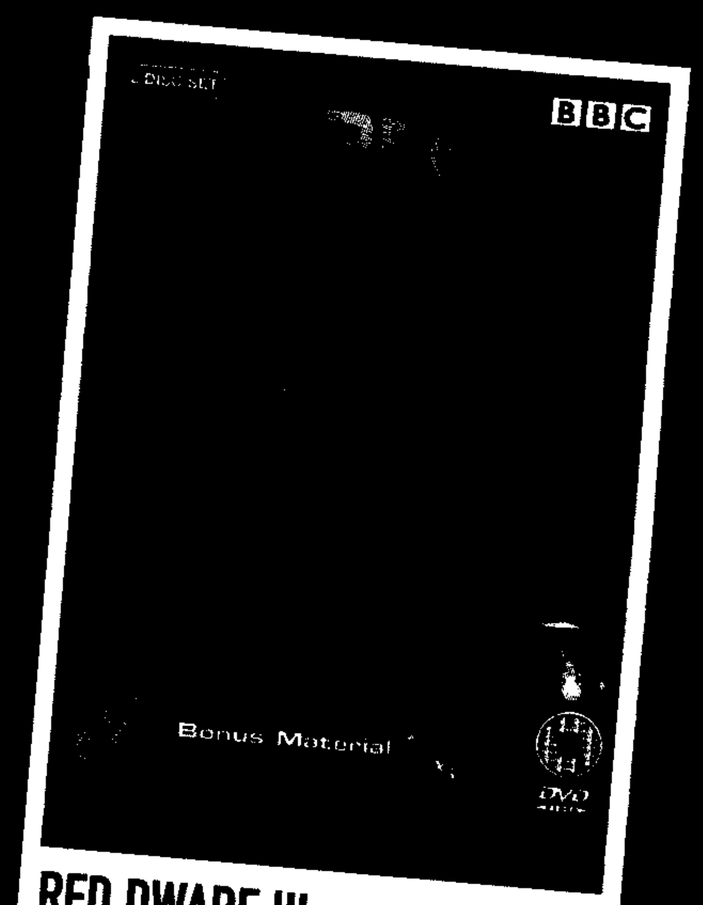

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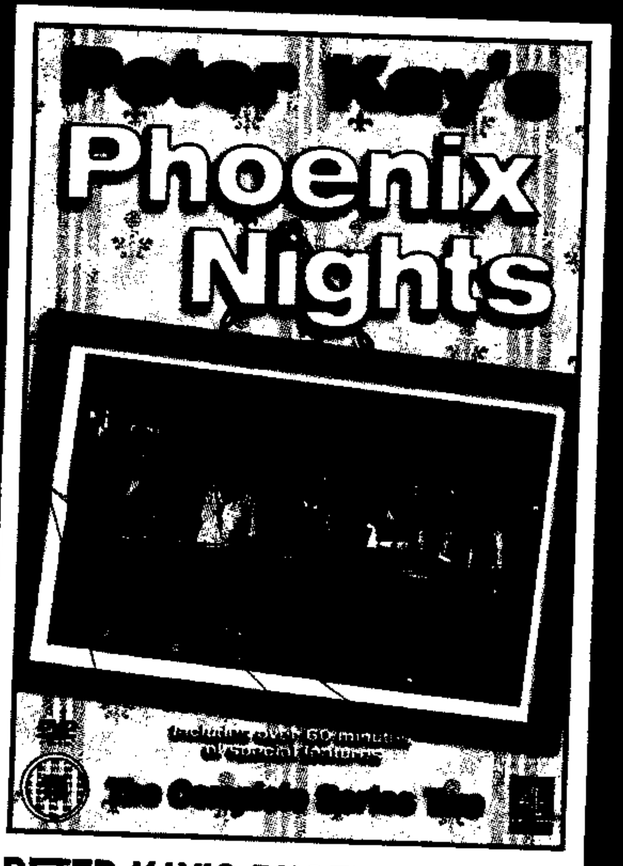

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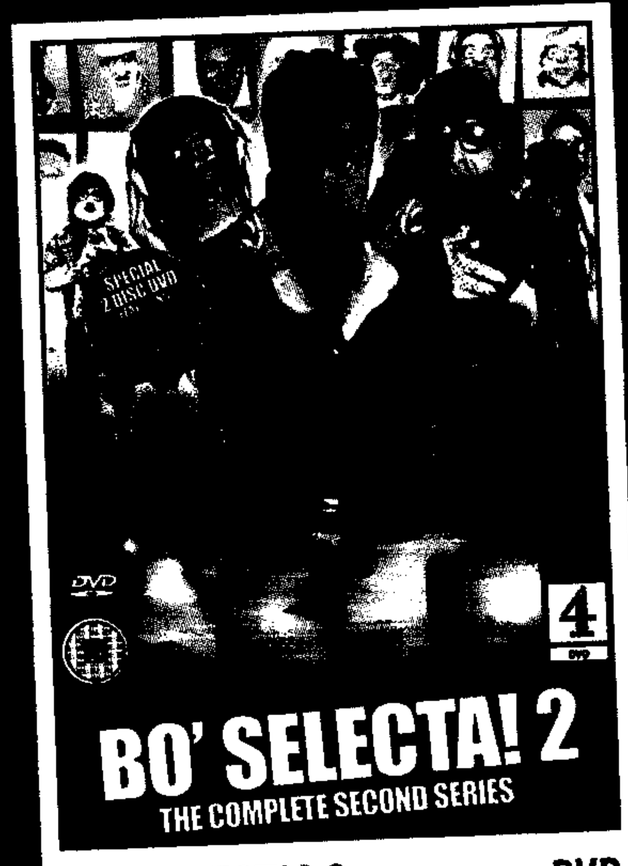

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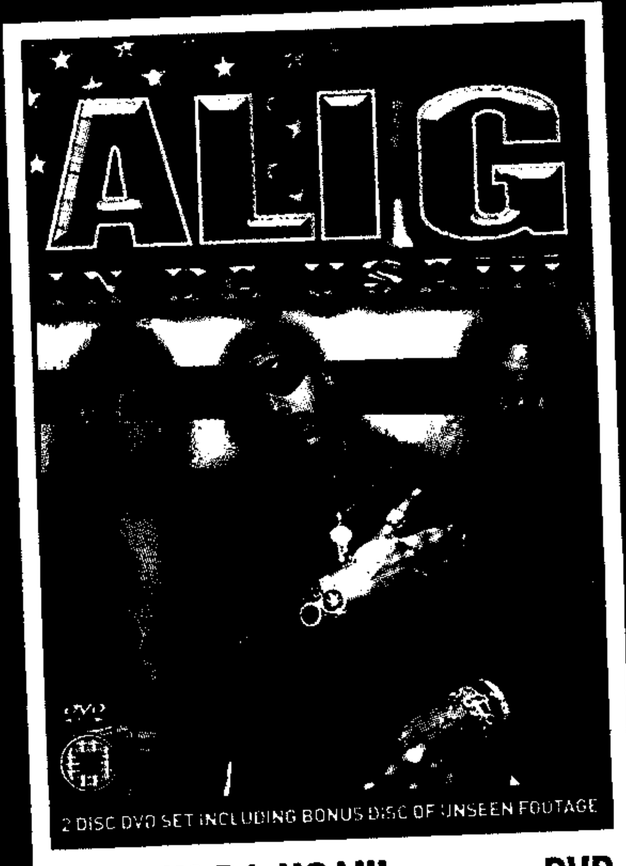

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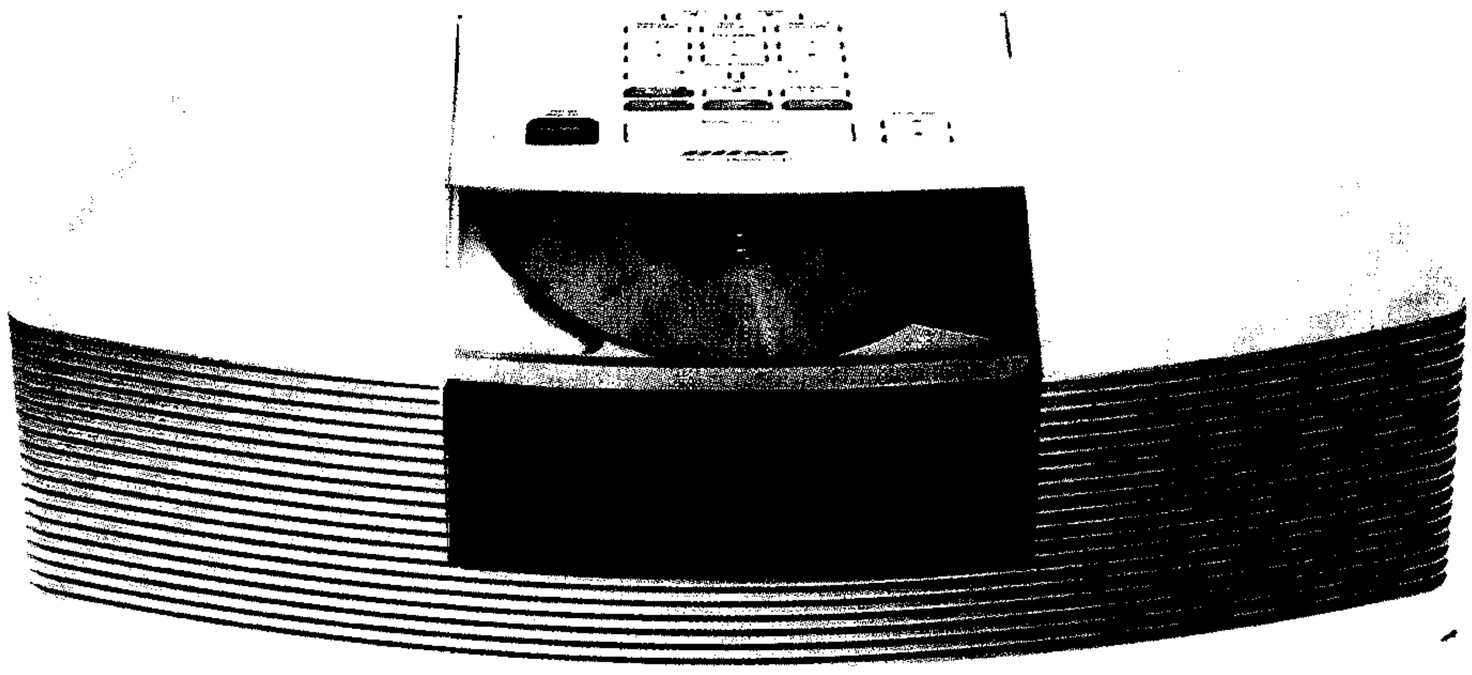

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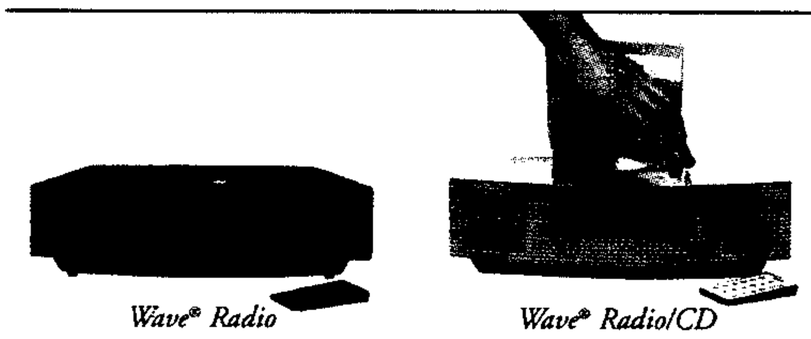

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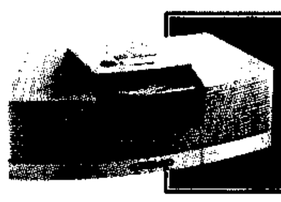

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